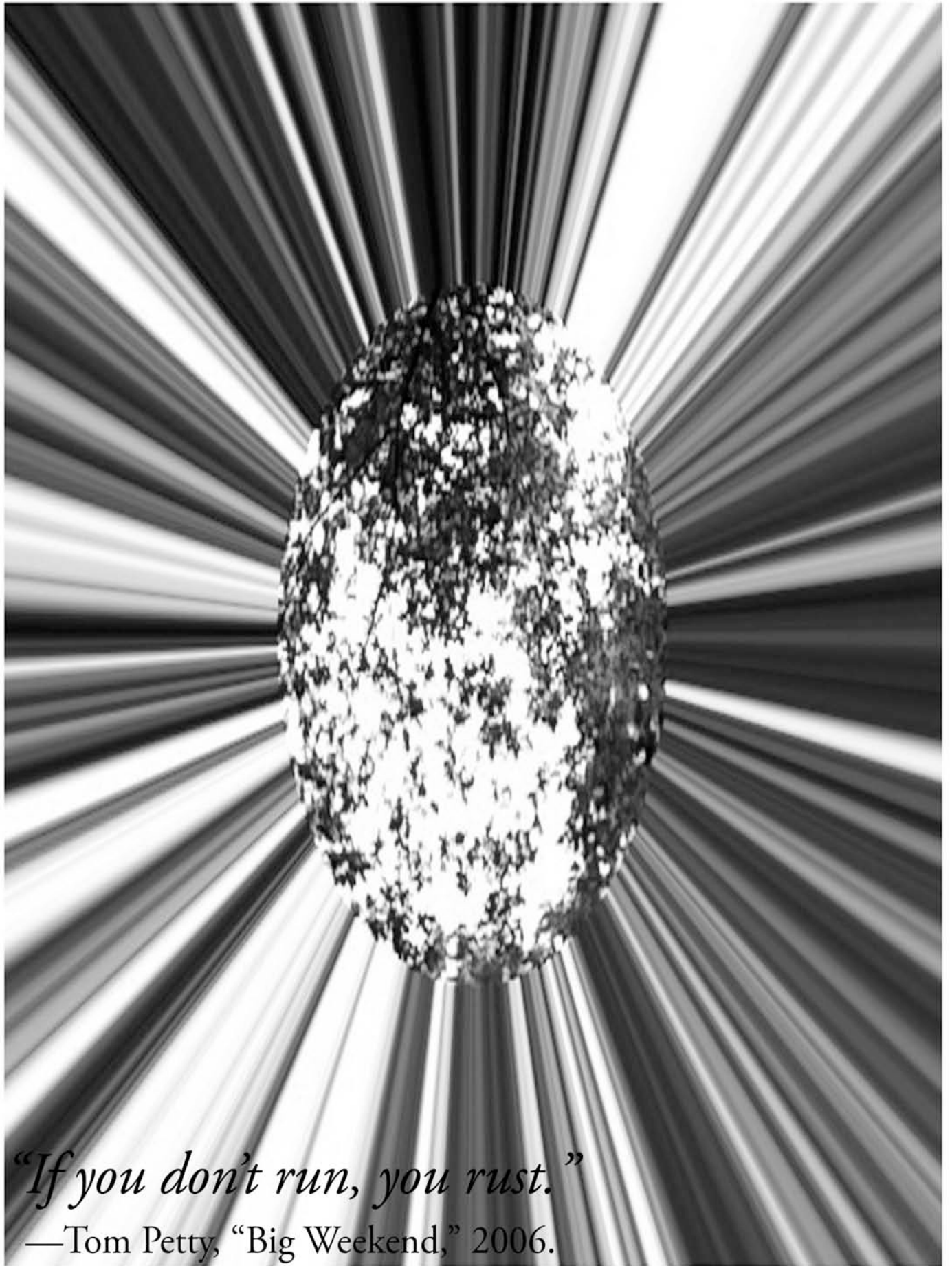


The Cenacle



Number 58 ♦ June 2006



"If you don't run, you rust."

—Tom Petty, "Big Weekend," 2006.

From Soulard's Notebooks

[June 13, 2006
Starbucks Cafe @ Olive Way
Seattle, Washington]

Many Musics

"Fate isn't what we're up against
there's no design, no flaw to find"
The Shins, "Young Pilgrims," 2003.

i. Many Musics

Many musics, wake, blink, call it a world.
Wake, blink, call it your world, leave dream's
warped glare, exhale, return. Sing true,
many musics, through the day's tasks,
through its troubles, from some kind
year, its elusive face, to another's heart
liquid cracking hungry into wood, shouting
dancers, full moon's frenzied lean.

Skins & gazes lash with, the forever of
a few ragged nights in high voice & stout,
a dance's fabled memory still wooden with
heat. Later a new elixir & follow the
fire along an extra mile, and gleeful tick
in deeper & burst around wide, many
musics coming faster. Sing true! How the
night loses nothing to its great brood of years!



-8-

I want because I know none other.

I sing because truth lets me no other way. Many musics, danced by the hard muscles of art, the burning arc of fist & fingers, the discordance of worlds canded together by love's ceaseless puzzle. Wake, blink, reck the miles left in your ~~your~~ heart, years in your thighs. Sing true, Go!

ii. Dis-Illusion

Midnight when the quiet parts & the way splits out to light, come to me, path, I am hardly more than just another who wakes & does not know, who loves & does not know, who wants & does not know. I dream this world, it turns by wood & steel, & I do not know.

The way is called dis-illusion,
motten new press to go.



-9-

The brown air of many days parts
as I move through, there is a
brutal report. Is it dream or is it
me? Who clutches & falls in the
next moment? Who lets go the sweat
of life's many plain hours & its
several golden ones? What now, as
neither do? If so, whereon?

The way is called dis-illusion, far
scatter of songs, now will to chase on.

iii. Bridge of Glass

Dis-illusion, & how far? Til the Shine &
every soft memory is a revealed setpiece?
What truth is enough, covers all, sinks
wide & high enough? Could the pink bloom
in hand another sure way to the sweet,
staying place? Do you know? Would
that gauze near your cheek be any
dearer if proven true or prop?



-10-

I am asking because this bridge
of glass shows a river below & it
~~looks~~ real enough, but what is enough?
Which humbles the heart more: beliefs
honed to a few or disbelief seeping
through? Why ragged ~~hungry~~ ^{burning} through this world
frays shadows & dust ~~but~~ ^{yet} I wonder what
moves the world but a greater arc half arisen?

iv. Sweet Reveal

World soften with many story, long
with shivering grace, little but continuance,
none, can you imagine a new stroke
or sh? little, none. Yet the seed pops,
the striping caterwauls, another to
the bridges, mapless, every face its
wanting tale, flesh surround, direct,
distract, what was it anyone said
but the present hour's least hungry truth?

Reck a scent you do not know or
bear. Follow its fenceless path,
tell nobody, lose a little, & a little more,
bury something back.

-11-

V. Song Brote

Many musics, the blind suck of
want, moonlight's bright cluster of
nagging old stories, not a spasm happily
sniffed but the next. I look this
one to that one & say give it, now
more, maybe hope that some
human tongue better than mew & bleat.
Breach the gift of a wide open eye in love.

Give it, not to a bent idea called God,
not for blood & brethren's familiar train.
Rouse the six warm curves of a square,
hit a beat to dream's paradox of time.
This want, is old, old, maybe even
moonlight's coarse sine, gift to a
world raised of toneless clay, missing
dear its greater arc of explain.

I look to this one & that one with
this question, flaming spire of doubt:
What buries, what lingers, what travels on?
Give it, & another, if you really learn how.

~~11~~ -12-

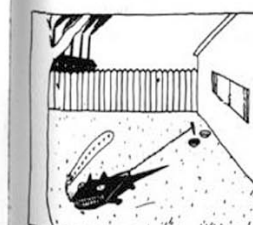
vi. Preach

A singer reminds me to praise God,
loved shaping hand of all, sweet holy
in every lost hour's crash, coming
fruit in the artist's blooming stroke,
what common pours wild in buzz, wing,
cruelest shot's report. Praise God &
trust to life's fine ^{and} ~~descent~~ home, where little
explains & less needs to. Praise God &
submit to the story. I listened an hour,
midst the ricochet of my sins
& scars, & the next remembered, &
the next grasped, & the next looked
on for some new song.



THE ANGRIEST DOG IN THE WORLD

The dog who is
so angry he
cannot move.
He cannot eat.
He cannot sleep.
He can just
barely growl.
—Bound so
tightly with
tension and
anger, he
approaches the
state of
higher mortals.



By David Lynch © 1990

The Cenacle

Number 58 ♦ June 2006

Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. 

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Thank you to the Resistance everywhere for, in known & unknown moments, standing up tall to the Empire, for remembering other years & the dear, generous impulses which bind us all still to them, & for anticipating with daily sweat a time not too long from now when the mean, criminal titans of the moment slink away, in repudiation, if not in outright shame. Their time of breeding fear to squeeze for coins is coming to an end. Some will land in jail, some will simply bloat down from great fists of temporal power to old, pathetic men, wistfully sorting through their fiercer years. Such days cannot come too soon . . .

Ric Amante**Perennial**

There will always be
a poor, lean man
pedaling a mongrel bike
against rush-hour traffic—
one bony hand steering,
the other pressing
a rumpled sack of food
to his chest—avid,
and lawless as a duke.

It will be dusk, it will be winter.
Headlights of throttled cars power
the spine of a monstrous glow-worm.
He angles between snarling fenders.
Slips by oil tanks nestled in gravel
like eggs of alien reptiles.
Darts beneath the blinking white eye
of a leering smokestack.
Crosses a river clotted
with yellow rags of ice.

Until vapors and thoughts
impel him to a ruined bench—
chiseled by knives,
draped by willows.
Here he sheds bundle and bike,
makes a seat, rolls a smoke.
Sits with the darkness
at the edge of this ride,
witness to a crash
as his evening star rises.

Resurrection

I followed a robin this morning
as it scurried through the rubble
of a burned-down church
in search of the spirit of a worm
or some dead hymns to pick at.

Twenty years ago I watched her
at the gates of a New Orleans cemetery—
her and fifty others, an orange shroud
feasting on bone-rich soil.

And earlier as a shy child
daydreaming at pantry window—
ambushed by the staccato run,
exalted by the sudden carolling.

Each spring the robins come sure and hungry
with hard black eyes and rich red song.

Wish You Were Here

Fifty yards out my motel picture-window
the Atlantic rolls in and slides back
in cool white sheets.
Five miles further out,
scallop boats are black spindles
against a blood-orange sky.
And in the foreground by the sagging snow-fence,
planes of gold light fracture the eaves
of a vacant clapboard beach-house—
a Hopper painting, a Hopi cliffside,
a stark embrace of light and line.
I walk out onto my second-floor porch,
take a seat on a cold plastic chair,
take in all that's before me,
all that is missing.

Archaic Quatrains for the Sexes

I

On this cool and dreary evening
our lust breathes life and heat—
we're moving into open seas,
we pause but don't retreat.

Voluptuous and volcanic
this air this blood this gaze—
in every least touch of the flesh
electric do we lay.

Nepenthe and sartori
the twins we nightly score—
crashing on the shores of bliss,
release—then nothing more.

II

He a man quite common
and she a woman fair
will gather at each other's side
a healing true and rare.

Nothing need be left unsaid,
the heart will not be martyred—
everything that love purveys
will find a working barter.

Trust and caring each to each,
a home of stone and space—
death a world we'll come upon
as it reveals its place.

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Things Change (Six Thresholds)

[a new fixtion]

“Nothing I see can be taken from me”

—Phish, “Bug,” 2000.

Part One.

Something, not yet word, nor yet shine, yet beyond shadow, no longer blue fancy, i don’t know, a game, this cosmos? time + play? something from somewhere, wreckage of a dream, not yet word, nor yet shine, no longer blue fancy—

She turns away. i follow the path her dark blue eyes trace, through lights & trees, through mortal noise, trackless breathless path, i follow wishing to learn, she turns back to me & smiles, I drop, am dropped, then she must catch me too, must teach me, must show me how to learn, not yet word, not yet shine, not hardly blue fancy—

Night burbles fulla details night is secret governance of all, night is scripture & confession, truth & heresy, lights fulla water, flames floating flesh, she turns away again I close my eyes & discover better how to follow, what reveals to he who does not seek—

World not revolving, no, world undulating, world mist & meat, world history & undifferentiation, world the plow & the pen, wet with desire dry with mortality, world floating careening crashing creating music world all music world is all music all music—

the flow of energy into, out of, creation, time a mischief floating nowhere, everywhere, time spun by fear, evaporated by laughter

she’s tickling again it’s how she tells me certain things what words? none—her touch dances & presses—fingers telling of colors she’s been dreaming no formula yet for their pigment—laughter rips through kings & maps, laughter fringy with weeping like always—

Universe, we do not know thee most times, we mistake thine glimmer for thine truth, art thee grasped somewhat listening to heartbeat, falling through water? Universe, we writhe & reduce thy depths to our tears, our twinklings, our lingual writhings, we are things, we are animals, we are spirits, all in one, we pray while deaf, we are someone from somewhere, who are we? Birdnoise explains but we speed past. Dusk drips meaning midst shadows we remark the day’s human traffic. Night bright & wise with revelation we angle our attentions toward blood’s several yawpings, the squawk of seed the whine of nesting—

She disappears at times leaving a glint to cuff me—then off to where liberation’s sexy voice leads—I leave a full plate & a neon carnation for her return—for the need, for the hunger, for the deeper reasons she always returns to me—

Returns oft-times at night, holy night, reverence to thee in wakefulness & restfulness, when together we observe what emerges, when apart what disappears—kindly night, buzzing architect of our touch lingual lovemaking—night dancing, nocturnal ecstasy, pouring & burning & hollering & arriving into dreams, the door, dreams, the open door, dreams wherein Rebecca & I are never apart bloodlight bonded—Night raging, a herd wild,

grieving, unsure, lost, clues everywhere, even fancies roar with Goddly night, a bellow of wounded Yeses, a ballad of breach-bred bitches wed ever to their numb natty corpses, build up build up easier target to curse & firebomb—

She says “I love you” & does not stir—

Night the blank paradise still dotted with glimmers of resistance, night awaiting continuous for the glaring puppets & young gems to return & better learned in the ways of he with club he with property he with leashed & muted heat—filling, emptying, everywhere a prophet, a scripture, a chunk explaining the beginning happy wiggle of first days with one explaining the end what way to float out? Buried & regretted? Released & expanding? How to depart with a greater cry than arrival’s? Never *end* stop crying from arrival to departure—

She moves near, the answer is Art, ever, the answer is Art, ever, the answer is Art—

We decide that these stories must continue, that Luna T’s Cafe must continue, that Noisy Children must continue

This world—it is ours—belongs to the extended family that foremost people it—I write down its narrative, I am husband to one of its principals, but it is no longer merely my world—I have relinquished such claim—

Anxious, irritated, closer to the source—fire explains only fire—love reveals nothing—trees provoke patience—kindness seems more important—Aldous nods, old, tired, true & good as a soul can be—there is movement—nothing changes—memories of a tin shack in the woods—

“am i there with you?”

—memories mean nothing.

Someone smiles pretty & asks me when Noisy Children is gonna bust out *Tapdancing in the Mindfields* again—says they play all of the songs but never with the narration—I shrug—“Are you like Hunter & Marshall?”—“you think I am?”—“I’m guessing—someone argued it on a website”—“oh”—“it makes sense”—“it does?”—“sure—you don’t play—you write—we figured you had some important role”—I nod—another pretty smile & gone—

Everything here remains at stake, more than ever, gone the city, the map, the road, kin only recollected with distorting buzz, no way back, no interest, travel now virtually limitless now beyond where/when, the predicaments subtler, the joys more mist than meat, fear more in the pauses & distractions, big attractive empty worlds—

Stop seeking, every sort of crazy scripture says. Wisdom from voice & star, rhythm & tree. Stop seeking. Listen. But I don’t know how to stop, don’t want to stop, have never before stopped

“It’s OK” she says “I’ll show you how” she smiles—

“Furious with existence, how to live, how to live, how to live & why?”

She looks at me blue eyes dark blue eyes cannot be explained she says “follow me in here, OK?” through a frame into a bedroom “follow me in here” she says to where things twist fall, curve, tricks, there is too much meaning then there is none, the floor perpetually giving way, the doors & windows do not help “what do we do now, Reb?” she says “follow

me” & we crawl into one of the frames on the wall, watch from the other side the collapse imminent “follow me” & into empty poppy fields absent of the human I we share a bouquet of dreams become naked become play become easy even beyond the subtlest hustles of rhythm & breathing “follow me” she disappears like the most revealing music does into the endless fields of glowing wheatstacks she nods I smile we agree there is a corpsey blue man playing guitar without shaking the air without jiggling a bone wild music sourced in no mortal nor any kind of singular personality yes she nods I smile we agree six windows approach from the distance, a choice or a wealth “follow me” I say, our blood heaved with blue music “follow me” she replies

There are more windows, this was but the first, there will be more windows, thresholds, each with a communication, a lesson, a yawp here we are, here we go—

& I will do the writing with humble pen you painted for me & you will do the painting with the bright brush my words handed thee

here we are always
 here we return
 supersonic wheatstacks
 we, accolates, masters
 another marriage inside
 another collaboration

hands twined leading each other to the farthest wheatstack, the deepest, glory, fecund, glory, potency, yes this is the one

one of us nods th’other agrees—& wheatstack becomes window as my pen her brush render it true one of its several moments anyway, wheatstack in snowy field, lightful grey sky, trees & farmhouses in the distance, becomes a window where we pause for a time, cusp of further gain, seeming always partnered with equal amount of loss, true if measurements were valid, now a tumble in, release, acquire, tumble on in—

“Call it Reality” I say in gesture to the most prominent wheatstack, Reb nods as tho she already knows, her hand sketching blurringly I follow more slowly taking in what we have here, the grey skies, the thick air betokening coming or departing storm, the other stacks present & how my eyes cannot quite group them all together, each is alone tho all of them will eventually become food or rot, still the one I began with is now called Reality uniquely among them, & Reb’s fleet hand is producing an image of it foremost among them all.

Rebecca sketches nearer & nearer to Reality, seems to wish to climb within it, I watch as she does enter it but it seems like the wheatstack makes room for her she does not disappear within it but made way for, her sketch deepens, develops an impossible multi-dimensionality about it she & Reality grok deeply in this moment of making I find myself drawn into Reality too so connected am I with Rebecca that Reality must have me too—I am still standing without the stack & I sense Reb is too while I feel us traversing deep within it—deeper than physically possible for it or either of us—toward what end tho?

Toward the wheatstack field within, through another frame, the air warmer, the sunset not a bitter old winter light, & our corporeal selves, such as they are, arrive after us, & here we are, deeper & deeper, lapping at possible meaning with black pen, with sketchpad, Reality stands again before us, alone in this dreaming, again, no matter the trees in the distance, the farmhouse, the other wheatstacks, thawing & dreaming, neither remembrance nor regret, no expectation, no words of any kind, seeking release? Final cessation to all

suffering & music? Are we thusly arriving at meaning at last? Rebecca is sketching with both hands now, her picture now has kinetic depth, she turns & smiles at me & I sense we must enter her picture now, faith again leading corporeality, Reality now gains a communicative music, drifts & swirls & follows us within the picture of itself, calls for more color, wilder music, the beginnings of a new freedom, thinking not in cycles nor maya but to reinvent the world you must begin everywhere & nowhere—"Yes" Rebecca nods & I agree—

Within, without, both, neither, without sinking to fall, to fall, & know nothing once more, happily, her & her crayons, me & my football, her smearing jelly, me secret joy beneath a willow, her Dorothy, me Dorothy too, it seems to be our root, seems, perhaps there is deeper, no doubt perhaps, within's within, within's without, even deeper we share love of that which lies in ruin behind a gate & a sign & a padlock, Rebecca nods, we leave Reality behind, the truth of Reality is no-truth, we hold hands, my left her right, I write, she sketches, we leave Reality with poems & pictures hung to its strews, leave neither entering nor passing on, the music is everywhere, one moves from note to note, no lines all curves, without's within, within's without, all flows, all matters, nothing is lost—

Nothing is lost, nothing is unimportant, all feeds all, everything ends, & a beat, & everything begins again, Rebecca is tired. We sit somewhere. There is cheese & bread & clear water.

She curls in my lap, I feed her in tiny chunks, she chews slowly, kissing hard my cheeks after each piece is gone. She rests more easily, quietly, sleeps trusting in my arms. Fears not a thing.

From dream to my embrace she hums notes, searching, playing, scratching. To play one true note, to offer it from within's within like a new kind of kiss, one that stays does not dry unto death, the kiss burbling sunshine beneath this life's nightly bed or rubble, just once, & so she seeks, twists in my arms, I watch her mouth intently, will the kiss blossom there, no, this kiss emanates with chakra-truth from many places, all connected now one, is kiss spasm supernova, & I watch her & barely cohere to scribble:

"What burns in you is beauty.
Beauty burns in all creation.
Here you are, first & last flower
of the world, there you'll go,
joining other dreamers in those
hills, there you'll be, now fully
a dream:

Beyond knowing's fruitless toil."

She enters more deeply in dream, beyond knowing & dream now, seeking to come at me from the other side of the circle, adding rhythm to paradox, calling it love, yes, calling it love, & calling me now too, down into her dream, "follow me" she says, & I no longer heed the borders between our bodies, I draw her sleeping hand to my black pen, we jack in, conduit of fire, yes, nothing is everything is nothing is everything is—

We believe in everything.
We believe in nothing.
Simply put: Love. Hope. Music.
Nothing. Then Everything.

All alone. All suffering. **Bullshit.**
 No walls to breach. Breach doubt.
 All that is, flows. All flows.
 We believe in everything. Always.
 We believe in nothing. Fiercely.

Pen still moving but who moves it?
 Do I? Rebecca? Do we? Do you?
 What are the powers undaunted
 by obvious illusion of existence?
 Who walks bravely on floors of light?
 Who dares think a carnal thought?
 Who challenges nothing with a hard
 wink & a quip?

Who says “Fuck this all I need
 a goddamned drink”?

Who? The vicious glare but count their boxes like old women their frail lace—the powerful
 preen in numbers & bullets but fear empty gardens—

She giggles & growls & pulls me close says “there is no answer,” I remove her sunshine
 yellow frock & think “there is sadness & morning light,” she unbuttons us, unclasps, unfurls,
 the need to mount, to have, the need to receive, to contain, I say “There is no meaning” &
 together we ignore the morning light as it accumulates until it no longer exists—

A new day deep in the world’s woods, morning crawls into the sky, flesh & feather breathe,
 branch & antennae, stalk & limb quiver, the dreaming music spires out, then a beat, then
 stillness again, the woods slept, cupped in Rebecca’s two hands as she rests lightly in my lap,
 we are now in a window again, choice again it seems, so it seems, so it ever seems,

now several hours earlier, deep in the world’s waters, no belief as ever in sky & land, fear of
 light, perhaps of change too. Nothing is named or divided. Nothing loves. No loss, no burst,
 no bloom. Rebecca casts seeking, defining blue eyes about & there is a somewhat attraction
 here & a somewhat repulsion there, there is settling, there is ascendance, she sets fire, many
 things burn,

the weaker hours now, time where bullets & beauty clutch & claw, for capitulating cry,
 crosses & cunts, savage combatants, high above the world shimmer & cloud, the silence of
 paradise, of perfect undulation, we wield pen & brush, compel wild movement, the cave-
 born upset of the creating hand, caress, make, hurry, still . . . fuck . . . kill . . . comfort . . .
 create & create & create, night upon midnight, down in the heart of the world, all was well,
 all was calm, change, decay, growth, illusion, beauty, the pyre was ready. Tonight’s
 resurrection will be spectacular. A thousand, ten thousand, ten ten thousand dancing bodies,
 pressing heat to its own outermost ambitions, sparks shaped like hearts tumble toward the
 stars, Rebecca presses deeper within, panting, laughing, does not still for waving machines, I
 follow her as she blurs, as she becomes breathing & no more, trail her as vapor til my drops
 are swallowed & spit too, behind us perhaps a line of followers, learning to know nothing

better & better, come grab your heart-shaped spark, hurry, follow her, follow her way, follow til it is futile & funny & you find yourself lost & alone & with a memory & a wish you fashion a road, or the idea of a path, & follow noone & never did, wake up, fool!

Laughter in my ears, eyes now open, awake? Well, maybe. Reb smiling all over my face & pulling me up no obvious relation where we are & where we were, I look around keeping clutch of Rebecca's hand but all is mist, there are things but no words for them so what can they be?

A thing not word, a word not thing, the universe hardens with a burning ambivalence I look at – who is – & – me & so I feel –

Music Power Fecundity Time annihilates light annihilates mystery annihilates that which strays too rhythmically til buried in flesh & words. We curl puppy amongst each other—

There is no answer. Tho I wish & hope & rage, tho he ten ten thousand years ago & she ten thousand years ago & they a thousand years ago also wished & hoped & raged, there is no answer—

yet here on these pages she will ever remain immaculate & young. Cutting air with blood, cheeks soft pink pursue gain gesture moisten still—there is no answer—

“Find the trees. Nuzzle the wind.”

“Learn how to accept. How to nod.”

Disappear along the path home & how often the wish, the hope, the disappointed rage when a reason dissuades. Now riled I tug at my muse's hand & we continue on, back, wherever—

I lead Rebecca for the longest time, hurry, slow, we go at my velocity, she lays her will with me, there is no resentment, I must go, I must bring her, no gain or loss in this

Cease. Fuck-ass stop. Nowhere. Here we are.

A cave because I say so. Rocky womb with blankets & pillows. I go this far then am unable to continue. Rebecca makes our nest quietly, calmly. Paints a soft glow into the air, flickerless candlelight, more flow, my arms command her no hesitation she comes

One cannot embrace & keep tho I try this—I hug her until she can't breathe & she smiles wickedly at me. “don't break your muse, Ray” whispered bonelessly, but I jump

“Is't possible? Can I break you, harm you, betray you, lose you, what then?”

Rebecca does not renew our embrace, she draws us down beneath our covers, holds our eyes, mine hers same eyes now adjusts us hands legs eyes

I push her hair from her face holding her eyes our hands atwist our legs squeezing

I pull back she chases

“Don't let go of me no matter how hard I run Don't let go of me Rebecca”

“You're not running you're here it's OK let go release”

The fury of existence. Call it all illusion watch it slice you burn you break you kill you keep you

Happiness no limits Rebecca nods & bites my shoulder so I will feel how wildly she does exist happiness breaks & mends she pushes me on my bed & I know to receive not offer she sprawls over me gripping my shoulders digging hard her mouth on my mouth tongue pressing in feels me still thinking & presses one of her feet into my groin, hard caresses I begin to lose thought, no more thought, thought is for aspiring species, becoming now bloody-backed angels becoming more than tell or explain blood merging anew depthless agony to release let it all the fuck go

liquify, flow, yowl with all so many years restrained, all is water, learn this, all is water, all flows, beyond water,

my darling, my wife, my mate, my muse inhale exhale inhale exhale

first everything, then nothing, is clear

“Another”

“You sure?”

“Another, please” taps glass on bartop

“Hold on, bud”

“Another *now*”

Americus steps over. “It’s OK, Chuck.” Takes bottle from his friend’s hand, fills glass, leaves bottle on bartop.

“Thanks”

“No sweat”

“I didn’t mean no offense to your man here”

“None taken, friend”

“It’s hard, this time of year”

“It’s *always* hard”

“Yah” kills drink. After a moment, pours himself another “That’s our problem. Always fucking hard”

Americus taps his heart. All three nod.

“You’re kind. I appreciate that. I ain’t no regular here. I’ll pay for the bottle, I promise”

Americus shakes his head. “No. We don’t do that here. What you don’t finish take with you. Chuck will bag it.”

“Why? Why me?”

“Who the fuck knows? We all end up asking that”

“No I mean the free bottle. All this attention. I’m nobody. And I’m kind of rude when I drink”

“Sometimes you gotta say fuck it.”

He nods. “I’d do the same for you. I would. But you don’t want money.” Sips. Sad.

The old man rears up just then. Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker who spends his dwindling days & nights at the bar of Luna T’s Cafe drinking black coffee dosed with Kentucky bourbon, smacks his cane down hard on the counter announcing his imminent set of observations.

“Tonight could be the night of revelation & extinction! Quiz not the motives of Doom’s sudden alarms! Wonder not at the first flares of apocalyptic news!

“Do not query the mute flora & fauna, testing & tapping the damnable limits of their aid & advice! The fields are empty of all save sinners fleeing, futile stratagems!

“What lacks here at the end amongst our fugitive numbers is a softness, a mercy, tenderness.” His voice drops. He stands, shaky, but does not fall. Raising a sweeping finger round the dim tavern he continues barely audible. **“Tenderness does not reside among our mortal numbers any longer. The wanton & wicked bear now texts for eluding demise, theses built from the iniquities of modern science & contemporary lordlessness that claim unbesmirched souls now habitate this fallen world!”** Breaking off from this caterwaul suddenly, Knickerbocker agilely makes for the tavern’s lone window & runs his cane straight through it letting in a rush of wind & snow

“Feel that, unredeemed dwellers within these tavern walls! Feel the coldness from without match with the permanent clime within thine souls!”

Mr. Bob the barman makes toward Knickerbocker but Americus shakes his head. The stranger with his bottle sips hard & shakily. “Call the cops! He’s crazy!” No reply to this.

Rebecca appears to take Dr. Knickerbocker in hand, lead him to the manager’s office’s couch in back. He is weeping & raging now, but diminishing. **“No tenderness, child. No tenderness”** he repeats as he is led easily to his rest. No tenderness. None. Fuck it one & all.

I’ve been waiting to love you all my life, nights & rages, bags of flows, ignorance diminishing, words flagrant & lawless in the face of truth, I sleep with you in my arms & dream of sleeping with you in my arms, no truth, no tenderness, nothing

“Stop” Americus says he & Mr. Bob ready for what I might try or do

“I’m chill”

“No you’re not”

“No I’m not”

She sits down next to me & thus Rich & Mr. Bob depart no concerns now.

“Are you OK?”

“Yes, Ma.”

She giggles. “Are we here or not?”

“Dunno.”

“For awhile maybe?”

I nod.

“I’m glad.”

I take her hand, study its slender fingers. To my mouth & I suck each finger slowly. She tastes like flying, I think, helpless for a better word.

This world is fat with miracles & woe, fat, with fire, with pain, with chocolate, with maze, with crowds around an empty water bowl, with stumpy lords rich with echoes & corralled power.

Tastes like flying. I lick her palm & she wiggles.

“We’re freaks, Bekah”

She smiles & nods. "I think so too."
 "Freaks" I say again.
 "It's not bad, Ray."
 "No. Just is."
 "And?"
 I shrug. "Dunno."
 Rebecca stands up. "OK. Let's go."
 "Where?"
 She smiles. Takes my hand & we leave.
 The freaks will never own the world. I keep thinking this without prompt. A praise
 for all of us. A warning too, I think.

Cease, release, stop seeking to know, my wife nods, now all of 20, she looks slyly at
 me for my news, & I refuse her none of it, unable to, she nods, smiles, laughter ever floats,
 ever renews, I nod too, how fool to fight this happiness, she tastes like flying, what more
 clue is needed?

"A full moon, dancing shadows, fire all night" I say. She nods. Knows the story.
 "I've learned how to keep dying since, to have the chance to return or not."

"And you do. Um, return I mean."

"Yes." Nothing is what it seems. Stay still. Let the fuck go. So seems the advice that
 dapples my mind at its clearest. "I'm glad you do," she says.

Stops. Faces me. "I'll find you. If you don't return I will find you wherever you go."
 She is beyond sprig. Fierce. Steady.

I nod. Hope. Despair. This is what love is like. We walk on.

"Bekah."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to write a book"

She stops again. Mouth opens & closes.

"I mean inside this story."

She's still looking at me dumb.

"You could make illustrations for it if you like."

She blinks.

"I'm going to call it *Why?*"

I take her shoulders, & shake them. "What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"It's like those paintings you see that contain other paintings in them."

She nods. Thinking. "What will it be about?"

"About a man who makes butterflies from fire."

She brightens. I chuckle. Reb is a sucker for an idea like that.

"& you said I can illustrate it?"

I nod.

"What else is in it? Did you write any of it down yet?"

"I'm not sure. It's still mushy in my head. Except for the man who makes butterflies
 from fire."

We walk on.

"So you like?"

"Sure."

Into the Season of Lights, up the many steps & on in, & at the entrance, upon bare touch of the first tribe of a million we huddle close & our mouths touch & our tongues mate & my small yellow vial drenches these same tongues with the Elixir of Knowing, the Water of Logos, good goddlian drops of LSD-25, ten? fifteen? twenty? I squeeze til the vial is emptied 'pon our tongues & she tastes like flying & now I do too & we become flying, become that which dreams advise me night after night, we become flying, a gull, an oak, a weed, glowing pair of eyes, into the lights, spreading in & about the lights, becoming the light, the one light that in all light we fold forward into cosmic undifferentiation & backward into the deepest reaches of wizard time when all was not known & named, when universes played in groups & reinvented each other & reinvented themselves & still do see now see here time a field of wildly blooming weeds nay a grunting track by a warm pond's edge—

Vision rises, colors & bells, the lights multiply to tree, the trees shimmer like bells, we lead each other through forest of reverberations to the cement clock tower, four-sided, tall silent ridged finger, here we settle back into flesh & time, agree again to the pretty illusion, remind each other not to forget life is but a dream, life is but a dream life is but a dream

Sitting together on a grey cement bench, Rebecca looks at me steadily, waiting, perfectly patient, she knows this is how it is with us, what we must do, & she flows with this nearly always, wife, sister, mother, enemy, student, teacher

mate in joy & grief
funky bitch, carnal friend
love made of blood & mud
teacher with teeth
mother with hunger
sister with glee
enemy til the spasm
mate in joy & grief

I hug her & we moan healing into each other, exchange knowing heat

“I know less & less, Rebecca,” I manage to say after the longest while.

“Good” she nods & hugs unto me.

“Is there a story here anymore, Rebecca? I just don't know”

She looks nods at me. “This story is what you are within all the stupid bustling of your world.”

I laugh but then see she isn't joking. “Sometimes I think I'm losing to the bustling.”

“Sometimes you are.”

“I don't know how to stop.”

“But you do.”

Silence.

I do. Through Art to jack into the other, bigger places. Serve the greater sum, always, as it ranges musically between one & infinity

“What do I let go, Rebecca? Or who?”

“Not who. Not what. More like, um, when.”

Silence.

The psychedelic sacrament takes deeper effect as Rebecca & I begin to merge with each other, with landscape, with these words as I write them down it is not joining of this & that so much each temporary autonomy giving way its border—it’s hilarious in a way—that society is constructed on the false belief that these borders are real & constitute a valid way of assessing & denoting order—

we laugh the same laugh neither mine nor hers not even ours really as it no more belongs to us than we to ourselves—but we laugh on daring anyone to happen along & argue

& would it matter I don’t think so because no borders are everywhere & once this is one’s chief thought so much foolishness is simply abandoned——

Falling into these words & finding them wet, finding their depth that of an ocean, into these words, Rebecca’s hand mine hers as we fall into these words & are able to see through them from the other side, looking back up where they float before continuing deeper within them & past them swimming toward a place unknown, plummeting & thinking “Six thresholds what can such a phrase mean? & what does *Things Change?* mean for that matter here we are I am he/she pressing effortlessly through pages & what can we be coming to nowhere somewhere anywhere everywhere ah a light perhaps an answer perhaps——

A moment expands impossibly & there is a slower flow, seems like clarity, resembles clarity, I look at Rebecca who is present again to be seen & she smiles that peyote & cherry vanilla smile at me

shiver, tumble, lean forward, let go, smile too, all is free,
smile, all is free

“How are you, Reb?”

“I’m good. This trip isn’t scary yet so far”

I nod. “I feel like we can do anything right now but what?”

She leans into me and finds my hands & her warmth lights me up. “You never stop, do you? Not ever?”

“I guess not. Too little time. Too many bastards.”

She squeezes me hard as she can. Muse, mate, goddess. Much more.

“I want to go further, Rebecca. Faster, harder, bigger, wider”

“I know. You’re always like that.”

“You’re used to it?”

“I guess. It’s your way. You don’t mind my ways. I think you’re easier than me.”

“I’m easier?”

She sits up, nods. I laugh, don’t know what she means, decide I don’t care.

The extended moment of clarity begins to swirl around us & the lights taste strange & the air ripples & I manage to say “here we go Reb again!” before we disappear slowly slowly then quickly——

What remains a holy emptiness, the persistence of mold, still hungering for her crevice of treasure, secret burning city of bliss, invisible forest, happy fleshfulness—

I have only these words to retain you. Symbiosis. Silliness. Flow. Music. Endurance.

I've lost you again midst this cosmic foolery, but have learned to keep your touch by recalling your nude wiggle round our Sunday morning bedroom opening the curtains & sketching my beard, your writhing as my body forms a circuit with yours, fingers within maidenhair, lips upon nipple, fingers tribed fingers, lips pon earlobe, fingers kneading fleshbone—

Today is always the day to believe in everything for no damned good reason. To begin. To continue. To deepen.

A ring of echoes round the universe. A glance that began a thousand centuries ago. Mirrors of fire before time began to contrive its noose. The lost explanation of flight without wings. A book called *Why?* I compose most nights in my dreams.

Merging with my muse, becoming mate to my mate, the swishing sound deep inside solid things, the great secret emptiness powering all animation & existence, the push & grind to whirl up color & sound, become mate, become muse, become that which one truly is, Aldous gone 38 years ago talking too of kindness, of the revolution most truly manifested in kiss, in touch, in listening for one clear moment to anyone or anything, the mad whirl becomes world, & some moment's gap between why & what, thus loss, thus the twins called strangely Nothing & Everything help Rebecca stop me—

“It's OK”

“I can't stop. I won't ever. Not ever. Not til they drop me down.”

“It's OK. It's OK.” She holds me quietly, bravely, my face muffled against her chest & hair. Hours & years have passed. The TV is on.

“I bought that used in '85 I think. It was used even then. Older than you, wifeness.”

She giggles. “Watch it for a minute or two.”

I then realize more clearly we are actually in Rebecca's bedroom in her & her father's home at 50 Harvest Street near downtown Hartford. The TV's glass screen wavers for a long time abstractly then Rebecca holds my head still & it coalesces.

The man in feathers on TV is a preacher, he raises his arms to signal the chorale's commence & cease, his voice I cannot make out more like noisy rising falling ocean waves at first so I watch his feathers shake & glitter, & fall off a few at a time—

Rebecca disappears completely. My face is shaking again but I think maybe she's gone to greet the preacher on the TV as she greets Dr. Knickerbocker at Luna T's Cafe—

She's said something tho that I struggle to recall. Butter . . . pecan?

“Ice cream!” she says with a tot's grin. She moves me around in the bed as I gape at her—seeing my face she hugs me fiercely—no words—fiercely—

hands me a spoon & settles the paper tub between us—sighing & giggling again, she reminds me about spoons & eating & ice cream—I nod solemnly & she laughs ridiculously—

“Ray!”

“OK—I'm alright”

The ice cream provides balance somehow & I begin to depend on it, eating it slowly in small bites—I look at Rebecca amazed tho I can't say why—there she is—

“Don’t abandon me” I say as quietly & steadily as I can—she looks at me calmly. “Never.”

I begin to calm. OK. Alright. Something settled then.

I look back toward the TV & the picture is a closeup of the feathered preacherman’s grim, wild face, his eyes blue flames, his skin growling with glow—fuck if he isn’t looking hard at me—

“Go ahead, Son. Give her bouquets of ecstasy & annihilation. See how long she stays. Do you call it Love? Do you call your union a marriage?”

I try to turn & see Bekah’s face, see if she could possibly be watching this too—

“Turn not to thine bride. Face me! Question not the verity of my appearance before thee! These words scrawl your heart every single moment!”

I can’t even blink.

“Have you yet chosen whether to survive or perish along the way home? Thou canst do both!”

His feathers glitter like pulsing little beings, his chorus, his fucking pack—

“Thee art known o surely yes. Thy words have scurried & travelled the land. You rile & rile & rile that which is with thine demands—thou bearest fearsome pen at times wildly wielded—the often scattered & by choice obscure powers thou holdeth probe & prey as much as soothe & praise—thee art a danger whose fate in the long view has not yet been adjudged. Words. Wounds. Laughter. Lawlessness. These are thine prominent themes.”

I twist away to see Rebecca & she is watching me—calmly—a breath from smiling—I don’t know what to say to her—impossible to sort out the actual from the possible from the illusory here—

She looks more thoroughly at me & breaks into action. The TV is immediately extinguished. She vanishes the ice cream, moves about in our bed until I am leaned back easefully, off goes the light, & I feel a light sheet cover our feet & thighs. She curls along me & I can feel that she is nude save panties. I wonder what I am wearing. I wonder why it matters.

She says nothing for a long time. She lets the room’s riled air settle. Her hand rests still on my chest. I feel her warmth all along me, waiting but patient.

“Thank you” I finally croak pathetically. She raises up & leans a kiss to my cheek.

I move a bit & she deduces to cover us more & to crawl into the cradled embrace my arms can’t quite offer.

To play one true note, evolving into higher music, into a presence neither wishing nor resisting. To play one true note & watch you dance, cyclone, fury, a mind, several, many, all, watch you top me where I lie, splayed & spun, playing one true note, evolving, hardly keeping up with you, you slow, & wait, wanting to evolve with me however much longer this will take, tonight, my love, I continue to approach you, crawling branch to branch, scribbling moonbeam to beam, approaching you as I am able, you have slowed to wait—

“It’s OK, Ray”

“What?”

“I’m not, um, losing anything”

“You could go faster”

“But why would I want to? What good would it be?”

I nod. She’s right. I’d wait for her too—no doubt—

To have come this far is to have twined many roots together, to have shifted between you & me, him & her, us, them & other ways of denoting countless times—

To have come this far urges the going on—urges hope no matter the clouds—hope—yes—hope—yes—hope—yes—

So we lay atwist beneath our sheet & the day approaches infinitely slow—the radio comes on—piano music—sad & slow unfolding into spritely wild—I think a thousand things a minute but come back to the hope of making Art, its perpetual open door—as my thoughts cohere a wrapping finger at a time around this theme I pull my wife in deeper, closer embrace, open up to her in new, willing ways—

“I want to leap into you, right now, Rebecca, I want to know what is unfamiliar behind your blue eyes. How to do this, my love?”

I watch her beautiful face intently in the cohering dawn light—she ponders knowing I wait—

The apartment is very quiet—Rich’s & Franny’s bedroom is several doors down & not a noise from it—Harvest Street is peaceful this early—my mind is still riddles composing riddles but less so—I’ve laid most of my attention clearly pon my wife—

“I think we need to go to Luna T’s more often like we used to—& we need to do our art together & on our own”

I nod, listening, waiting—

She smiles & taps my nose with her finger—“Are you really going to write a book called *Why?* about a man who makes butterflies from fire?”

I nod smiling.

“& I can illustrate it?”

“Yes, Rebby.”

She rolls over on me suddenly & squirms to sitting atop my stomach. Still humming with thought. “Will I make the pictures after it’s done or as it goes along?”

“As it goes along would be more fun, wouldn’t it?”

She leans forward to kiss me then remains resting against my face & chest. I rest my arms around her & we are quiet for a long time—the dawn manifests like a third person in our room—

“You’re right about going back to Luna T’s—we’ve kind of lost touch?” She hugs me closer.

“I miss it there, Ray, don’t you?”

“I miss the intensity. Not knowing what’s next.”

She raises & pulls me with her. “We’ll go today then. We’ll show up when Mr. Bob & Mr. Knickerbocker do. They’ll like that.”

“Aren’t you tired? We’ve been up all night tripping!”

“Do you want to sleep for awhile?” Her look is concerned but devilish. “I can go in the living room & draw.”

I’m tempted to say a number of things involving twined bodies in heat but refrain. “Yes, Rebby, your old man needs sleep.” Saying it aloud brings on hard all the exhaustion I’d been ignoring for hours. Rebecca covers me, then lays atop the covers over me, enjoying us, finally she kisses me slowly & deeply & departs or I assume she does for her kiss propels me into a psychedelic dream state. With my eyes closed I watch Rebecca leave the room closing the door behind but then I watch the room depart too either it floats away or I do because soon I’m undulating in a milky grey soup shot through by lightning bolts—

I wish I could retrieve Rebecca to me but then decide that she wouldn't like this & so it's just as well she's safe—wherever she is—slowly I realize I'm no longer in bed & seem to have some locomotive ability—transit occurs I discover through a combination of movement & thought—the sensation of traveling is signaled through an intense tingling which amplifies through my being the more rapidly I propel—since the milky grey soup is everywhere & formless & the lightning bolts don't really help, I am both physically and emotionally grateful for the tingling—

but what is this place if anything at all & where to travel in it if it contains anywhere other than this?

In dreaming one is more led than leading so I try to give over my tendency to general & let the dream take me where bound—

I accelerate til the tingling in my body is a moderate pace—for a long time nothing happens & I begin to doubt my plan—

Then I begin to doubt the idea of doubt itself & thankfully start to laugh—& as I do, the grey recedes a moment & I am able to gauge that I am really moving pretty quickly—I try to think of something else to laugh at which proves hilarious in itself & the grey soup clears up even more—

I arrive in the Americus family living room, now grounded, walking around, & there is Rebecca sitting in her father's beat old green armchair by the front window—she looks up suddenly in my direction, does all but sniff the air, but then returns to her pencils & artpad, legs curled beneath her, devotion, concentration—

I am dreaming, then—or tripping a visual narrative—um, something—moving closer, I cannot make out the details of her picture—all I can see is the same shifting grey goop I'd just been traveling in—so I haven't left it nor it me—a warning, or maybe just a hint—

OK—so why here? All that travel to arrive a room away from where my blanketed body lies? What is here?

Well the room is familiar but unmoving—no interest really in grokking it closer—Rebecca, then?

Err—study her the better without her awareness of me? Well—

What I see is more real to me than most everything in my own world—& this thought is both strange & plainly true—I don't know how it has come to be so—I suppose it was long ago that now began—creation after creation til one day I'm floating in a dream in a story near a character once my own now my wife—

Her energy is curled around her pad is feeding back & forth with it so I lay thinly along her drawing arm to feel its shifts & quivers—its pauses—its hurrying—I begin to feel that whatever kind of energy comprises me right now is also feeling into this art—making—perhaps Rebecca's thoughts are of me—there are subtleties here I cannot deduce—

I pour into her drawing hand—the fierce moments of its flourishes—then the slow dwindling frequency of strokes as she seems to be finishing—I can feel her focus dissipate & its subjects multiply—

Retreating back up her arm & undulating toward her face—learning, trying to learn—

disembodied to better understand embodiment it seems—spreading across her face, clumping near her freckles, her eyes, her mouth

looking into her dark blue eyes as they do not return my look so perhaps to learn them better—or not—for they seem at the moment less engaged, a kind of psychic dimness after Art? after loving?

seeing her this way is not knowing her better—to reveal, confess, share is an act, is a privilege, not a voyeur's toy for it is not me seeing her in white panties alone that means anything—it is *me* seeing *her*, the luscious moment we share, the feelings bathing us—

so I begin to dwindle back toward my body & bed wondering had there been any point to this—

“Of course!” she says, leaning over me provocatively & kissing me wetly midst my surprise—cherry vanilla & peyote—mm mm—always

“Are you finally awake?” she demands. We wrap in our sheet & I'm pleased she's naked as me—

“Time to carry further along this fixation, eh?” I smirk—

She nods half winking half serious—

“You're best when you do” she says fondly—

Yes—we are—OK—here goes—

“Stand! Up! Now! Pull me up! Now scamper & get dressed before my lewd thoughts assemble & riot! & yours too! Good! Fine! Cover it all up! Hey! Not that much! OK—better—fine—need a little treat for waking up! hehe—”

It's hardly 8 which amazes me but several clocks round the apartment all agree—Luna T's unofficially opens at 10 when Mr. Bob the barman arrives, shortly followed by Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker—

I dress in black—black t-shirt with curvy blue Phish logo on its chest—black corduroy jeans—Reb called this my delicious poet outfit—hehe—

Rebecca dresses for me plain truth—tight blue jeans, bubblegum pink t-shirt, tie-dye vest, old blue sneakers, a single-braid nestled amongst the long brown hair running down her back—she brings her artbag & her sweetest smile—

I think to myself: what my own world has cheated me of, or what I've cheated myself of, at least so far, this fictive world has provided—amply—

A walk from Harvest Street to Reckoning Road could take, has taken, minutes, hours, days—but not this time—the day is somewhat sun, kind of warm, but more anonymous than takes to lure me from our destination—so we arrive early—

Once through the barroom entrance, door locked behind us, a moment of ambiguous intent—

“Mr. Bob will know we're here” I say “or someone anyway. He can read raised dust”

Bek nods, smiles.
 “What do you want to do, Reb?”
 Her smile wickeds but she shrugs—

We sit on our stools far end of the bar—I ask her to draw, tell her I’d like to watch if she doesn’t mind—she doesn’t—opens her artbag, pulls out her sketchpad, fusses a bit before ready—

She uses a pen I gave her—black ink medium point expresso—same kind I use to write—it’s funny to see this familiar-looking pen in her slim fingers making no word but picture—moving easefully about the page even as my pen nearly always moves left to right—top to bottom—Rebecca’s fluidity—her visual music—I watch for the longest time not the paper but the pen, & then look for moments at her face—blue eyes humming, mouth a-smile like always—facial muscles neither tensed nor relaxed—in this moment Rebecca is home, native to this making—poised, kinetic—a perfect skein of notes—calliope—levitation—

Slowly she is rendering a Luna T’s the like of which doesn’t usually appear in these pages, a place of smoke & beer puddles, of worn wooden floor & perforated black rubber ceiling, a place of passing years as well as moments, of strangers who arrive once or twice & depart their news untold—

the time passes without audience as Rebecca draws & I watch—she seems near finish when her last detail clarifies itself—the door to the barroom opening to admit a figure—

“Rebecca! Raymond!” says Mr. Bob as I tumble from my stool & Rebecca laughs tribes of giggles—

Mr. Bob the barman, Charles Robert to strangers, closes the door behind himself grinning front & back of his head—Rebecca is over & hugging him in a flick—he shakes my hand smiling an embrace for me as well—

I sit quietly & still, waiting, hoping a scene will coalesce—this no longer my world per se, but as I’ve said one that belongs to others too—so I wait & pay attention & hope—um—that *something catches*—

& it seems to—Beckah & Mr. Bob know what to do—know I’m waiting—know that this isn’t how fiction goes—usually—or used to anyway—

to collaborate w/one’s fictional characters—one’s family, one’s friends—to open one’s hands to this—risk, foolishness, I don’t know—

The radio is switched on to an oldies rock station, musical news circa 1964 to 1976. *The Hartford Courant* is unfolded on the bartop, the sports section firstly extracted. A pot of coffee heats up. A glass quart bottle of milk. Several letters are handed to Reb, no doubt from the thick bunch the rest of which Mr. Bob handled invisibly. Rebecca is manager of Luna T’s Cafe but none urge reminder on her unless imperative. Her father is the owner but months at a time with his signature unsought.

“They hate thinking of this place as something managed or owned” Mr. Bob told me one afternoon, “So I spread out the mail on my kitchen table & tend to most of it without

them.” Laughing he says, “Usually on Sunday afternoons, my day off! I keep a ballgame on the radio for company when I can.”

Rebecca peeks over at me scribbling away, smiles. Her husband. Always. She knows I prefer her best creating Art or in my arms but she tends to Luna T’s faithfully.

“My dad needs me to do it,” she told me. “Mr. Bob helps a lot but my dad needs to feel my presence when he comes in. So I do the little things only I would know to do. Change his guitar strings on the ones he uses only specially. Um, put up poetry I like or newspaper stories. He likes finding little things I’ve put up just for him, & not knowing if I did it today or months ago.” She smiles. *Her* father. Always.

Awhile later tho she catches my look & knows it to be of a terribly different kind.

She’s with me invisibly fast. With me, wordless. Waiting. She knows.

“I want you to draw something for me.”

“Of course. Um, now?”

“Yes. We have to begin.”

“Begin?”

I nod.

She’s got her sketchpad out & pencil. She’s waiting. She’ll be my instrument in this, as all things, when needed.

The door opens then & a force enters, expands impossibly, contracts slightly.

I frown.

But, yes, he’s part of it too.

“Saloon-keeper though the very day without these tavern doors betokens a wordless grace, an endless cup of redemptive light for all, he or even she alike, who but dip their sinscorched fingers in it, yet doth I observe thine punctual attendance to thine duties as smiling aid-de-camp in the slow but perpetual demise of this establishment’s dwindling numbers! Some choose damnation, Saloon-Keeper! Heed these clear & simple words well! Some would choose damnation every single time tho the cownibbling Hindoos & jihad-aroused Muslims by the millions paint across the skies pictures & pools & seductive cosmos of alternatives!

“There is for some no choice but damnation, no sane agreement to this life’s prolonged & incoherent duration but a sound thrashing frenzied blackness at its conclusion!

“Doth thee think Our Lord truly resideth in images of lambs & bunnies traipsing a summer’s day?

“Nay, Saloon-Keeper! I roar at thine deafness! Our lord resideth most truly in moments of unutterable pain! Our lord is revealed most plainly in his undiminished & unpretty

magnitude by the manner in which womankind is ripped apart to perpetuate this unjustifiable & perplexing species! Pried open by her husband's first visitation for the seed he shall plant that will gouge from her nine months thence any daisy remnants of girlhood as she presents him with the son that shall add anew to her burthen on this earth!

"Our lord manifests in the shredded thighs of womanhood, in the steaming guts of the battlefield, in the way earth is rendered & sky greyed for plunder & profit!

"Our lord manifests in nightmares & barrenness, in cruelty to the weak & disease in the strong—"

"In swift, Saloon-Keeper, I pronounce upon all the blasted & dirty makings of this befouled planet the pleased markings of the Lord about us, willing to accept our prayers without comment, happy to note unremarking the atrocities we commit in his service, eager to employ our race in its continuous self-gutting *in the name of our Lord!* The chalice of redemptive light without this tavern's sinpocked doors whall not be afear'd for going empty too soon!"

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker slowly wildly enters Luna T's Cafe sometimes aided sometimes impeded by his cane, sometimes that wooden instrument more employed in the giving of his harsh lesson to the nearly empty tavern environs.

My wife swoops over to Dr. Knickerbocker like he is beloved Uncle Arnie & has just recounted his morning grokking with the park pigeons.

"I'd like to dose his coffee just once" she says to me sometimes with the same dark blue-eyed glint.

Knickerbocker forgets Rebecca is 20, has forgotten this for 11 years running as she has aged but he hasn't noticed.

"My bones weary, child" he says sadly. "I fear I shall not see thee marry & mother"

"I did marry, Mister Knickerbocker! To Ray, remember? You performed our marriage!"

"He is truly a dubious one, child, to get thee with baby. He's a runner, worries about the rust pursuing him, worries about other chasers too—"

"He makes me happy"

"Happiness holds no real place in this world. Learn this hard lesson well. Note the spring blossoms, how they float by thy face, near, nearer, then away. Mark this image well, it contains much useful if soul-crushing truth"

"Mister Knickerbocker, do you like, um, our lord?"

He looks exceedingly old now, & fearsomely silent. "We cannot redeem Our Lord's grand creation until we have crushed Our Lord Himself in our

fists & then lived so long beyond this fateful moment that even its longest-lived recordings have themselves long ceased to bear a print anywhere”

“Oh” Rebecca then hugs the old fuck like he deserves it or something which, I suppose, he does in a way.

Nonetheless I tire of waiting for my matemusewife to finish her attentions to him.

Mr. Bob sidles up to me with a large glass of orange juice & a smirk. “He’s what my young niece Audrey would call a ‘rock star.’”

I nod. He is.

I sip. Wait. Mull. Rebecca’s time with the old preacher matters as much as anything, more than most.

Mr. Bob settles on a stool with sports section of newspaper, laying the paper on the bartop near me. Not too near in case my notebook comes out. But near. Kindred-near.

The barman & the preacher as much family to me as the wife-artist—I find no great surprise in thinking this—the thicker & vaster the web of one’s family the stronger for times of peril, times of upheaval—surely Knickerbocker had nothing the day he first walked in here years ago—older now yet very much more alive—his sermons have become battle cries despite their oft-repeated theme of nihilism & door—

watching him hold hands with Rebecca & speak quietly with her as he will not with any other & I realize he *does* know she’s 20, & dearly wishes to see her a mother—I know without confirmation, & am not wholly sure but it makes sense—

The extended hug he now receives is my signal that her ministrations are done—she returns to me afloat, sharing love for her a thousand sunrises of delight—

She waits. Rebecca is good at that.

“You just know, don’t you?”

She drinks her milk large glass from Mr. Bob thank you for calming the old preacher down for the moment.

Nods.

“I want this book called *Why?* to begin with a picture.”

“OK. What of?”

“A tree. A hand. Your face.”

“Mine?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Anymore?”

“A door. A star. A pen shaped like a lyre.”

She smiles. She knows.

“And I will write out of this picture.”

“And then?”

“And Noisy Children will play out of my writing.”

“Oh!” Pleased.

“They don’t know. Yet.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

“Maybe.”

“Can I start?”

“Don’t need a prompt or a match, huh?”

“Never!”

“Rebecca what will we call our daughters?”

“Eurydice. & Rebecca, you said.”

“No?”

Shakes head. “Only one me, Ray.” Blue eyes stones of fire.

“One daughter then? Eurydice?”

She smiles & starts drawing. “Just pose.”

“Me?”

She takes my face in her hands. “Ray, reflect me. Do it. I want to see you seeing me, OK?” I nod.

She uses two pens, always strange to watch her draw with both hands. Like a piano player.

OK then. A tree. A hand. My face. A door. A star. A pen shaped like a lyre. A picture that leads to words that leads to music. That lead—maybe—to a new picture? Maybe. He doesn’t think that way about Art.

He’s one of us in ways he does not really know, yet, as we never leave him he never leaves us, symbiosis he calls it sometimes thinking these thoughts bullshit, sometimes not.

A tree. I think about trees I’ve known, a lot of them, & trees I see in my dreams, some only once, some over & over, some are Artists like me & Ray tho I’m not sure if trees think of Art as we do, the little ones like it, & some of the really old ones do too, or maybe start liking it again, but there is a time in between where none of them care for it. All of them tolerate me & maybe some like me—they watch me, anyway, & especially when I sit near them & do my art while dreaming—

I let my two hands dance, one to the dream-tree I’ve known a long time, old, silent, impossibly big, I don’t know what kind, maybe beyond all that in a way, the other hand to a pair of striplings near where Ray lives in his other world, these two talk & laugh like kids but they are also wise, wise like it’s easy, like it’s a game, & a tree emerges on my page, a leafless tree with a squat trunk solid, gnarled from which blurrier & blurrier branches emerge, becoming rays of light received from the skyful of stars, & returned as branches of this tree, then I consider the next image, hand, & so draw a simple frame around tree & sky & place this framed picture wholly on the right thumb of a hand crouched into making picture, I’ve had to attach more paper to my first as this picture grows too large even for Luna T’s long & wide oaken bartop—

The hand is a body crouched holding its bloodstick I deepen its wrinkles making it an old old hand, not mine nor Ray’s nor my dad’s, older than Mr. Knickerbocker’s, old as that old silent tree old & oblivious of the picture, scrawled upon its thumb base, a hand lost to all memory & thought & activity but making, hard, constant making the final step few Artists take into a realm of pure creation, where love hate death none above or below each other, where there is nothing but creation & decay & creation anew, a hand into a realm where I will not go yet, nor Ray, nor my father, all invited, all tempted, but all of us still here aware of this greater realm, world, dimension, reality but none ready yet, none of us ready yet—

Using more paper, picture now spread on the floor of Luna T’s bandroom, tables & chairs pushed aside, I see that the hand is reaching through a door, a door strangely alive, furred, nearly trembling, a door warm, blood-warm, nerve-sensitive, the hand reaching through an event in its life, maybe its greatest event, maybe its birth or death, but probably not, probably not sexual either, more of a lesson, a great painful lesson, one yearned for,

feared, the doorway is entirely filled with this moment, wisdom & pain, laughter & release, & then I wonder about the next image, a star, perhaps it is easy enough to have the other side of the living learning doorway reveal a star from which the hand emerges but I think that easy is not really the point here, a book called *Why?* & Ray insisting on its multiple makers & many results so I mull & stand & grunt & return to the bar where Mr. Knickerbocker is standing up, shaking, waving his cane around, saying

**“We bleed & we suffer & we loathe! We pace & we ponder
& we groan! We know, we confuse, we hunger! We flee! We
flail! We fall!**

**“We give years of our attention to the wiggle of the fair,
associate wisdom with a remarkable set of curled eyelashes,
ponder curve, mull whisper, loop upon loop ourselves in
provocative curiosity over a set of ruffled skirts!**

**“We expect of our Lord an answer, a clue, a test with an
outcome we may hold like a bluebird dead in our hands from a
solid stone & a true eye! We bulge with anger over the
inexplicable! We feel shards of answer in the summer’s heat,
the night’s breeze, the cathedral’s hum, the painting’s glint, the
cougar’s shuffle, the locomotive’s thrust, the coffin’s silence!**

**“I say now to every present sinner in this befouled
establishment, be ye here resident or transient: the answer is
atwist with afternoon sunlight every day of thine bedeviled
lives! The answer rests on snowflakes tumbling into the
emptiest & remotest arroyo ye dare not even dream of, the
answer tumbles with the emperor’s sliced head into the basket
lined with black lace! The answer rests quietly upon the closed
eyelids during the moment between the conclusion of thine
uttered prayer & the resumption of thine shattered course!**

**“Hunger, ye devils one & all! Hunger! Hunger! Shriek
clutching coins & talismans, the end will wholly gobble ye
every one to the last!”**

He looks at me quietly watching him & his cane does not slam the bartop as it usually does at the end of a speech. He gets back on his stool with help from my dad. He keeps looking at me. Then he faces the bar & takes his coffee cup up to sip.

He comes over to me & we hug immediately & life remembers colors I’d forgotten!
Our hug goes on & on.

“I love you, Daddy.”

“And you, Beautiful.”

“Um, Dad?”

“Sí, chica?”

“I need your help with my picture. It’s kind of out of order but I don’t think Ray would mind.”

“You need me playing?”

I nod, trying not to look about 8 years old. But I can tell by his Rebbby-you-break-my-heart look that I do.

They’re both so much older than me, Ray & my dad. 37 & 41. I’m 20! But I’ve been drawing since I was 4 or maybe earlier so maybe that means something.

It’s not easy saying what here. Realizing what I was a part of just hit me hard all at once. It’s not like being Ray’s muse or making art for Noisy Children’s albums.

“Would you mind, Daddy?”

I think he’s going to piggyback me back to the band room but—no—he wouldn’t right now—& he’d think he was right not to—which he is—but isn’t—

Suddenly I want Franny around very badly—

He takes my hand. “Take care of the Doctor, Chuck.” Mr. Bob smiles & nods.

The star becomes my dad, easily, no seams, no eureka. He sits on the stage’s edge & starts strumming—I hear phrases of songs by the Beatles, Noisy Children, Phish, Jimi Hendrix—and I am drawing him into my picture he is the star, music, light, Art—the old hand holding the pen radiates through the live door from starshine & its partner—hand on the shine’s other side is strumming a pen shaped like a lyre I keep adding little details here & there—my dad is sitting at his—our—little table beneath the front window but facing me—playing eyes closed—he’d seen my picture in a glance while sitting down that was enough—his playing floats—clusters of notes like blackberries on a bush—like a flock of pigeons scared up from under a bridge, flaring, exploding into the sky

& I wonder if it’s enough—I’m usually so confident about my work it scares me to doubt—

I begin to deepen my picture to trace in half-formed images—shapes that trail into meaningless—and I begin to listen more synchronously—is that a word?—to my dad’s playing—adjust to his shifting rhythms—feel how his guitar & my pen & pencil are, um, singing to each other, then singing with each other—my instruments scratching out a frenzied music his guitar twists with til it’s not the picture or the notes per se but the taps, scratches, strums, til there is harmony,

& there is a panicked search for crayons & a hurried softening & crumbling of them, my fingers easing & shoving them into the picture & I go for oils just little bombs, dabs I add rarely but thick & wet, & a bit of watercolor which I always use when I can & my dad plays on & on & is joined by Jim Reality for awhile maybe others time is gone my hands are smudged & filthy with color if I’m going to do this there will be no doubts left swinging ghoulishly in my picture’s face—

Rebecca returns to the bar face shining with stars of ecstasy, smudged, face & hands, the familiar look of the Artist both sated by fierce work & hungry, wonderfully, unreasonably hungry for more—

Her kiss is a bite & her sequel wink a raw estimation of my person—I nod—we walk plainly entwined to her manager’s office in the rear of Luna T’s Cafe—

“She’s gonna get her some”—wet, hot laughter—

“He followed the tried & true adage”

“What’s that?”

“If you can’t find a good woman, grow one”—guffaws like falling shingles—harsher cries for liquor & beer—

I’d looked at Jim Reality earlier—whilst my wife-muse was in the other room warring—& smiled watching him hold his glass of gin like an aroused breast he planned shortly to consume—

“Things change” I said quietly. The bar was still fairly empty, its population scattered about the city, chewing up the workday’s waning minutes fast as they could—

Jim sipped, becoming a gin-human hybrid life-form for a couple of minutes—I waited—

“Things change?” I asked.

“Which?” he replied.

I bit off a few ounces of ice-water & said “You told me things change. I thought about it. I agree but I don’t.”

Mr. Bob settled near us quiet as a shadow. Listening.

Jim took another lustful sip & his glass nearly moaned with happy lover’s glee.

“‘Things change,’ you said. ‘Things change?’ I reply.”

Jim nodded, his blue eyes floating peacefully. He swayed nearly invisibly to Americus’s guitar from the other room.

“Which?” I said.

“Yes” he said, turning to me clear-eyed & fully present.

“Both?”

“Yes.”

“Both.”

Jim finished his drink & stood up slowly. Smiled at Mr. Bob smile barmen play hard & years for. Looked at me. “Time to play.” He picked up his guitar, invited me along with his kinetic eyes, I declined with a headshake, & he was through heavy swinging door to Luna T’s bandroom.

Mr. Bob fetched me a fresh full glass of ice water. Patted my hand as I reached for it, with nay a word.

Rebecca calmed some once we were alone in her office, cuddled on the couch, Traffic’s *John Barleycorn Must Die* LP on stereo’s old turntable.

She was entirely within my arms, hands twined mine, head resting against my chest.

“How are you?” she asked cautiously. Quietly.

“Better, Rebbby” I said & kissed her head.

“No, tell me.”

“Hopeful.”

“OK.” This she believed.

“Sometimes pleased.”

She twisted so that her face was upturned to mine & I bombed her lips with kisses. Each one finished with her saying “Mmmmmmm” liquidly. Satisfied, for the moment, she snuggled again against me.

Americus loaded his wife Franny onto the back of his motorcycle & roared into the twilight—she’d been down south with her brothers Michael & Stevie—he’d done some good thinking in her absence & decided he had somewhere to show her when she returned. Told her earlier that day to take a taxi home from Bradley Airport, toss her bags inside their

door at 50 Harvest Street, take a nap, a shower, put on an outfit cute & tight but still comfortable & come over to T's & meet him—all of which she'd done save the nap—too excited to see him again—

Things change. Things change? Yes. Both. This the first threshold, where begun now left, where begun lost. Lost? Both yes.

Months have passed, ambiguously, not a rule of language or narrative which isn't vulnerable to a sneer, to a snub.

Rebecca strokes me suggestively, more than suggestively. Her fingers touch with leer & love. My hands rest inside her panties now, which she'd shed at a flick muchless a nod, but right now enjoying the feel of her pussy, its curves & heat, its pleased welcome of a curious finger

"Fuck me, Ray" she moans.

"I fuck you day & night, wife" I snicker.

Her lips clench my finger tightly. "Fuck me now" she growls. Her hand has escaped mine & marauded through my belt, jeans & boxers to finger me aroused but not hard, this hard caresses, squeezes, teases with purpose & ease til I am raw—

"Fuck me, Ray" her pussy lips & fingers squeezing my finger & cock first alternately then in unison—

"Hungry girl" I croak.

"Very. For you. Now."

I twist my hand a trifle that a second finger may enter her. She moans.

"Fuck me" she orders.

"Fuck you, girly?"

She raises my free hand to her mouth & begins to bite its fingers one at a time. Bite, suck, mmmmmm. Bite, suck, mmmmmm—

Americus & Franny ride into night into southern Connecticut, eventually into hills, roads less & less travelled, both helmeted, Americus's a tie-dyed design, Franny's a mock of the Confederate flag that once flew over her native Georgia, this one not stars & stripes but peace symbols, marijuana pipes & rock guitars—

Eventually to roads not really roads, paths, traces of paths—

An old building high in anonymous hills, deep in unpeopled woods—

Unpainted, looking abandoned, a sign so decrepit one would not know to look for it—

STARLIGHT LOUNGE – DANCING & COCKTAILS NIGHTLY

Americus parks in front in the beautifully tall weeds, waits for Franny to dismount, then gets off himself. Parks.

They stand in darkness hardly offset by the lounge's spectral glow.

They kiss spontaneously.

"How are the boys?"

"Crazy hicks like always. They wanna know when next my Yankee husband is going to ride his bride down to Dixie & renew his drinking lessons at the feet of the masters."

They both laugh.

"In awhile, I guess. We're needed up here. All of us."

She squeezes him thoroughly. "I'm glad to be back."

They walk up the rickety steps, Americus practically carrying Franny to protect her from fall, Franny smiling memories of moonshine shacks she'd known in her adolescence.

Rebecca nude laid out on the couch full length on her belly. My fingers, sometimes one, sometimes several, slide along the smooth heat of her neck, back, & buttocks. Her eyes are closed as she feasts on my touch.

I move from the floor to the edge of the couch & she shifts to leave me space. My hands cohere into massaging agents, finding her places of tension & pressure & releasing them one at a time. Her sighs escape gratefully.

"You did wonderful work today, Beckah."

"I did?" she turns to look at me. Her face ravenous.

I nod. "We've begun. We're along the path now. Things change. Things change? Yes. Both."

She turns away, lies back, shifts her shoulders by way of suggestion to my fingers.

The Starlight Lounge contains unending midnight, perhaps after midnight, shapes & shadows cohere after a time as one adjusts to them.

Rich leads Franny to his usual table. Makes his way without err to the glass-doored refrigerator in the rear of the place. A shelf labelled "Salinger, Jerome David" & "Salinger's Muse," the second of these two labels clearly newer, contains Dos Equis beers for her & Harp lagers for him, & several pints of Poland Spring water for him as well, just in case. He fetches a Dos Equis &, after a moment's thought, a Harp, & returns to their table.

"Ree-chard, my goodd friend! Youu hahv ree-turned!" cries the pleased voice of the impossible fat owner McFarland.

"I brought my wife, Franny" Americus says, raising his bottle first to him then to her.

He stands in waves & stages & removes his hat bowing low & smoothly, a wonderfully seamless gesture.

Franny smiles big & raises her bottle to him.

My fingers slowly massage themselves between her round, tight asscheeks, descending within & within. She gasps softly when the tips begin to stroke her anus. I stroke harder to her moans.

"You like, girly" I whisper wetly.

She nods, weak with raised heat.

One fingertip enters her & her body shakes like mildly electrocuted. The finger stills, then begins to probe deeper inside. Her moan resumes, louder & steady.

My left hand doing this work, my right hand is free & lands near her mouth. She greedily snaps for it & catches it.

As my left hand does its work, she bites my right hand with greater & lesser approval.

Eventually my fingers withdraw & seek her pussy lips again this time to inflame & explode.

"Things change. Things change? Yes. Both," I say quietly.

"Fuck me now!" She cries. I nod.

“So this is your bride,” says the woman, Miranda, a set of curved shadows.

“Franny” the girl names herself.

The shadows nod. “Good hips. Bright eyes. A keeper, Richard.”

Franny laughs, loudly, merrily, for a long time, & the Starlight Lounge is invaded & cleaned up for awhile by a powerful blonde light, a fierce living force it has not known in decades.

“Eggseelentt!” cries old fat McFarland. “Eggseelentt!”

I enter her swiftly then pull out slowly, thrust hard, then retreat slowly, again, & again, fucking harder, then slower, fighting rhythm’s temptation, harder, harder, slower, slower, harder! slower, harder! harder! slower

We climax within a second of each other, climax hard then ride lengthily the blind path back, moaning, laughing, kissing, better now, for awhile, o so much better!

Things change. Things change? Both. Yes.

Threshold reached, first one, where begun gone, nowhere & nowhen.

Joy fires wildly through me today, tonight, mind & belly fulla mystery & delight

All is groove, all is flow, sensation, cessation, sensation, cessation

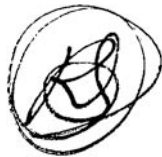
The pages happily fill, the night tumbles in like the tide, these hours passed finely, goodly, days, weeks, months, weeks, days, hours,

& something, nearly word, nearly shine, beyond blue fancy, a game, this cosmos, time + play, something from somewhere, reinvention of a dream, becoming word, beginning to shine,

yes, to hunger & fire & joy, to sunshine young & moonlight wizardly, to tents set up high in clear-aired mountains, morning puffing pipes, & midnight again—

To howls in arroyos, young seekers, hungry beyond words & numbers—

To groove, flow, evanescence, return. Things change. Things change? Yes. Both. Begin. Always.



To be continued in Cenacle | 59 | October 2006



Judih Haggai



boom

boom boom boom
 got the boom boom banging booms
 a metronome of crash and clang
 earth shakes
 puter vibrates

boom boom
 what's goin on in the hood these days
 can't sleep
 can't wake up
 boom boomin
 got the boom boomin goin on

hey, don't read the paper
 oh god, check the paper
 boom
 next door
 boom boom over there

and on life goes
 off to work
 off to school
 boom

and on life breathes
 off to shower
 off to breathe
 boom

don't read the paper
 boom

talkin to da neighbours

talkin to da neighbours
 yeah, let's settle this
 no more war
 ya know, no more need

yeah, says da neighbour
 you're perfectly right
 no more war required
 no more war

uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh
 boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom,

wasn't me, said da neighbour
 wasn't me said me
 wasn't us said da biggies
 wasn't us said da smalls

uh huh, uh huh
 wasn't us
 wasn't them
 uh huh, uh huh
 wasn't nuttin
 didn't happen

boom, boom, boom, boom,
 boom, boom, boommmmm

Why Suicide?

why suicide?
why bother?
why the pretense that i'm worth the pain?

living is suicide
a one-directional moment
you begin, you know there's a finish line one day

why suicide?
it's all heading to that point

She Unrolled

she unrolled the turkish carpet
and found herself flattened in anticipation

walked on for centuries
looking up the ladies' skirts
into gentlemen's trousers

she felt the worst and the best of cobblestoned soles
she saw that all were the same
massive and plodding

the few who flew were saluted

she, flat and looking up
been so down it all looked up from there
gazed at the sky
waiting for a rush of salvation

Word painting

nails broken, reaching the mountaintop
i slide down a waterfall of acrylic words
fast drying, sledding syllables
swishing downhill in beat spontaneity

a cloud bursts alternate harmonies
another key, another throat
empathetic discord, sky-forming habits
haiku bungee, waving hello

living a slice of epicentre
a hint of galactic infinity
a song from a symphony of always
painting the now in tools of forever

midnight

night dreams explode
sudden fever shakes the ground
bird calls bring rain

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence

*Speech delivered on April 4, 1967, at a meeting of
Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church in New York City.*

I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice. I join with you in this meeting because I am in deepest agreement with the aims and work of the organization which has brought us together: Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam. The recent statement of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart and I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.

The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexed as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty; but we must move on.

Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history. Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement well and pray that our own inner being may be sensitive to its guidance, for we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.

Over the past two years, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns this query has often loomed large and loud: "Why are you speaking about war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent?" "Peace and civil rights don't mix," they say. "Aren't you hurting the cause of your people," they ask? And when I hear them, though I often understand the source of their concern, I am nevertheless greatly saddened, for such questions mean that the inquirers have not really known me, my commitment or my calling. Indeed, their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which they live.

In the light of such tragic misunderstandings, I deem it of signal importance to try to state clearly, and I trust concisely, why I believe that the path from Dexter Avenue Baptist

Church—the church in Montgomery, Alabama, where I began my pastorate—leads clearly to this sanctuary tonight.

I come to this platform tonight to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation. This speech is not addressed to Hanoi or to the National Liberation Front. It is not addressed to China or to Russia.

Nor is it an attempt to overlook the ambiguity of the total situation and the need for a collective solution to the tragedy of Vietnam. Neither is it an attempt to make North Vietnam or the National Liberation Front paragons of virtue, nor to overlook the role they can play in a successful resolution of the problem. While they both may have justifiable reason to be suspicious of the good faith of the United States, life and history give eloquent testimony to the fact that conflicts are never resolved without trustful give and take on both sides.

Tonight, however, I wish not to speak with Hanoi and the NLF, but rather to my fellow Americans, who, with me, bear the greatest responsibility in ending a conflict that has exacted a heavy price on both continents.

The Importance of Vietnam

Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it is not surprising that I have seven major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would never live on the same block in Detroit. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

My third reason moves to an even deeper level of awareness, for it grows out of my experience in the ghettos of the North over the last three years—especially the last three summers. As I have walked among the desperate, rejected and angry young men I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked—and rightly so—what about

Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.

For those who ask the question, "Aren't you a civil rights leader?" and thereby mean to exclude me from the movement for peace, I have this further answer. In 1957 when a group of us formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, we chose as our motto: "To save the soul of America." We were convinced that we could not limit our vision to certain rights for black people, but instead affirmed the conviction that America would never be free or saved from itself unless the descendants of its slaves were loosed completely from the shackles they still wear. In a way we were agreeing with Langston Hughes, that black bard of Harlem, who had written earlier:

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. So it is that those of us who are yet determined that America will be are led down the path of protest and dissent, working for the health of our land.

As if the weight of such a commitment to the life and health of America were not enough, another burden of responsibility was placed upon me in 1964; and I cannot forget that the Nobel Prize for Peace was also a commission—a commission to work harder than I had ever worked before for "the brotherhood of man." This is a calling that takes me beyond national allegiances, but even if it were not present I would yet have to live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. To me the relationship of this ministry to the making of peace is so obvious that I sometimes marvel at those who ask me why I am speaking against the war. Could it be that they do not know that the good news was meant for all men—for Communist and capitalist, for their children and ours, for black and for white, for revolutionary and conservative? Have they forgotten that my ministry is in obedience to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them? What then can I say to the "Vietcong" or to Castro or to Mao as a faithful minister of this one? Can I threaten them with death or must I not share with them my life?

Finally, as I try to delineate for you and for myself the road that leads from Montgomery to this place I would have offered all that was most valid if I simply said that I must be true to my conviction that I share with all men the calling to be a son of the living God. Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood, and because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them.

This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak,

for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers.

Strange Liberators

And as I ponder the madness of Vietnam and search within myself for ways to understand and respond to compassion my mind goes constantly to the people of that peninsula. I speak now not of the soldiers of each side, not of the junta in Saigon, but simply of the people who have been living under the curse of war for almost three continuous decades now. I think of them too because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution there until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries.

They must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1945 after a combined French and Japanese occupation, and before the Communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. Even though they quoted the American Declaration of Independence in their own document of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its reconquest of her former colony.

Our government felt then that the Vietnamese people were not “ready” for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long. With that tragic decision we rejected a revolutionary government seeking self-determination, and a government that had been established not by China (for whom the Vietnamese have no great love) but by clearly indigenous forces that included some Communists. For the peasants this new government meant real land reform, one of the most important needs in their lives.

For nine years following 1945 we denied the people of Vietnam the right of independence. For nine years we vigorously supported the French in their abortive effort to recolonize Vietnam.

Before the end of the war we were meeting eighty percent of the French war costs. Even before the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu, they began to despair of the reckless action, but we did not. We encouraged them with our huge financial and military supplies to continue the war even after they had lost the will. Soon we would be paying almost the full costs of this tragic attempt at recolonization.

After the French were defeated it looked as if independence and land reform would come again through the Geneva agreements. But instead there came the United States, determined that Ho should not unify the temporarily divided nation, and the peasants watched again as we supported one of the most vicious modern dictators—our chosen man, Premier Diem. The peasants watched and cringed as Diem ruthlessly routed out all opposition, supported their extortionist landlords and refused even to discuss reunification with the north. The peasants watched as all this was presided over by U.S. influence and then by increasing numbers of U.S. troops who came to help quell the insurgency that Diem’s methods had aroused. When Diem was overthrown they may have been happy, but the long line of military dictatorships seemed to offer no real change—especially in terms of their need for land and peace.

The only change came from America as we increased our troop commitments in support of governments which were singularly corrupt, inept and without popular support. All the while the people read our leaflets and received regular promises of peace and democracy—and land reform. Now they languish under our bombs and consider us—not

their fellow Vietnamese—the real enemy. They move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know they must move or be destroyed by our bombs. So they go—primarily women and children and the aged.

They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas preparing to destroy the precious trees. They wander into the hospitals, with at least twenty casualties from American firepower for one “Vietcong”-inflicted injury. So far we may have killed a million of them—mostly children. They wander into the towns and see thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. They see the children, degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. They see the children selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers.

What do the peasants think as we ally ourselves with the landlords and as we refuse to put any action into our many words concerning land reform? What do they think as we test our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? Is it among these voiceless ones?

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation’s only non-Communist revolutionary political force—the unified Buddhist church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men. What liberators?

Now there is little left to build on—save bitterness. Soon the only solid physical foundations remaining will be found at our military bases and in the concrete of the concentration camps we call fortified hamlets. The peasants may well wonder if we plan to build our new Vietnam on such grounds as these? Could we blame them for such thoughts? We must speak for them and raise the questions they cannot raise. These too are our brothers.

Perhaps the more difficult but no less necessary task is to speak for those who have been designated as our enemies. What of the National Liberation Front—that strangely anonymous group we call VC or Communists? What must they think of us in America when they realize that we permitted the repression and cruelty of Diem which helped to bring them into being as a resistance group in the south? What do they think of our condoning the violence which led to their own taking up of arms? How can they believe in our integrity when now we speak of “aggression from the north” as if there were nothing more essential to the war? How can they trust us when now we charge them with violence after the murderous reign of Diem and charge them with violence while we pour every new weapon of death into their land? Surely we must understand their feelings even if we do not condone their actions. Surely we must see that the men we supported pressed them to their violence. Surely we must see that our own computerized plans of destruction simply dwarf their greatest acts.

How do they judge us when our officials know that their membership is less than twenty-five percent Communist and yet insist on giving them the blanket name? What must they be thinking when they know that we are aware of their control of major sections of Vietnam and yet we appear ready to allow national elections in which this highly organized political parallel government will have no part? They ask how we can speak of free elections when the Saigon press is censored and controlled by the military junta. And they are surely right to wonder what kind of new government we plan to help form without them—the only

party in real touch with the peasants. They question our political goals and they deny the reality of a peace settlement from which they will be excluded. Their questions are frighteningly relevant. Is our nation planning to build on political myth again and then shore it up with the power of new violence?

Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.

So, too, with Hanoi. In the north, where our bombs now pummel the land, and our mines endanger the waterways, we are met by a deep but understandable mistrust. To speak for them is to explain this lack of confidence in Western words, and especially their distrust of American intentions now. In Hanoi are the men who led the nation to independence against the Japanese and the French, the men who sought membership in the French commonwealth and were betrayed by the weakness of Paris and the willfulness of the colonial armies. It was they who led a second struggle against French domination at tremendous costs, and then were persuaded to give up the land they controlled between the thirteenth and seventeenth parallel as a temporary measure at Geneva. After 1954 they watched us conspire with Diem to prevent elections which would have surely brought Ho Chi Minh to power over a united Vietnam, and they realized they had been betrayed again.

When we ask why they do not leap to negotiate, these things must be remembered. Also it must be clear that the leaders of Hanoi considered the presence of American troops in support of the Diem regime to have been the initial military breach of the Geneva agreements concerning foreign troops, and they remind us that they did not begin to send in any large number of supplies or men until American forces had moved into the tens of thousands.

Hanoi remembers how our leaders refused to tell us the truth about the earlier North Vietnamese overtures for peace, how the president claimed that none existed when they had clearly been made. Ho Chi Minh has watched as America has spoken of peace and built up its forces, and now he has surely heard of the increasing international rumors of American plans for an invasion of the north. He knows the bombing and shelling and mining we are doing are part of traditional pre-invasion strategy. Perhaps only his sense of humor and of irony can save him when he hears the most powerful nation of the world speaking of aggression as it drops thousands of bombs on a poor weak nation more than eight thousand miles away from its shores.

At this point I should make it clear that while I have tried in these last few minutes to give a voice to the voiceless on Vietnam and to understand the arguments of those who are called enemy, I am as deeply concerned about our troops there as anything else. For it occurs to me that what we are submitting them to in Vietnam is not simply the brutalizing process that goes on in any war where armies face each other and seek to destroy. We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create hell for the poor.

This Madness Must Cease

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.

This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently one of them wrote these words:

“Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory, do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism.”

If we continue, there will be no doubt in my mind and in the mind of the world that we have no honorable intentions in Vietnam. It will become clear that our minimal expectation is to occupy it as an American colony and men will not refrain from thinking that our maximum hope is to goad China into a war so that we may bomb her nuclear installations. If we do not stop our war against the people of Vietnam immediately the world will be left with no other alternative than to see this as some horribly clumsy and deadly game we have decided to play.

The world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to achieve. It demands that we admit that we have been wrong from the beginning of our adventure in Vietnam, that we have been detrimental to the life of the Vietnamese people. The situation is one in which we must be ready to turn sharply from our present ways.

In order to atone for our sins and errors in Vietnam, we should take the initiative in bringing a halt to this tragic war. I would like to suggest five concrete things that our government should do immediately to begin the long and difficult process of extricating ourselves from this nightmarish conflict:

1. *End all bombing in North and South Vietnam.*
2. *Declare a unilateral cease-fire in the hope that such action will create the atmosphere for negotiation.*
3. *Take immediate steps to prevent other battlegrounds in Southeast Asia by curtailing our military buildup in Thailand and our interference in Laos.*
4. *Realistically accept the fact that the National Liberation Front has substantial support in South Vietnam and must thereby play a role in any meaningful negotiations and in any future Vietnam government.*
5. *Set a date that we will remove all foreign troops from Vietnam in accordance with the 1954 Geneva agreement.*

Part of our ongoing commitment might well express itself in an offer to grant asylum to any Vietnamese who fears for his life under a new regime which included the Liberation

Front. Then we must make what reparations we can for the damage we have done. We must provide the medical aid that is badly needed, making it available in this country if necessary.

Protesting The War

Meanwhile we in the churches and synagogues have a continuing task while we urge our government to disengage itself from a disgraceful commitment. We must continue to raise our voices if our nation persists in its perverse ways in Vietnam. We must be prepared to match actions with words by seeking out every creative means of protest possible.

As we counsel young men concerning military service we must clarify for them our nation's role in Vietnam and challenge them with the alternative of conscientious objection. I am pleased to say that this is the path now being chosen by more than seventy students at my own alma mater, Morehouse College, and I recommend it to all who find the American course in Vietnam a dishonorable and unjust one. Moreover I would encourage all ministers of draft age to give up their ministerial exemptions and seek status as conscientious objectors. These are the times for real choices and not false ones. We are at the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest.

There is something seductively tempting about stopping there and sending us all off on what in some circles has become a popular crusade against the war in Vietnam. I say we must enter the struggle, but I wish to go on now to say something even more disturbing. The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality we will find ourselves organizing clergy- and laymen-concerned committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy. Such thoughts take us beyond Vietnam, but not beyond our calling as sons of the living God.

In 1957 a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. During the past ten years we have seen emerge a pattern of suppression which now has justified the presence of U.S. military "advisors" in Venezuela. This need to maintain social stability for our investments accounts for the counter-revolutionary action of American forces in Guatemala. It tells why American helicopters are being used against guerrillas in Colombia and why American napalm and green beret forces have already been active against rebels in Peru. It is with such activity in mind that the words of the late John F. Kennedy come back to haunt us. Five years ago he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Increasingly, by choice or by accident, this is the role our nation has taken—the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investment.

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers,

profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say: "This is not just." The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.

This kind of positive revolution of values is our best defense against communism. War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons. Let us not join those who shout war and through their misguided passions urge the United States to relinquish its participation in the United Nations. These are days which demand wise restraint and calm reasonableness. We must not call everyone a Communist or an appeaser who advocates the seating of Red China in the United Nations and who recognizes that hate and hysteria are not the final answers to the problem of these turbulent days. We must not engage in a negative anti-communism, but rather in a positive thrust for democracy, realizing that our greatest defense against communism is to take offensive action in behalf of justice. We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develops.

The People Are Important

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression and out of the wombs of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that, because of comfort, complacency, a

morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries. This has driven many to feel that only Marxism has the revolutionary spirit. Therefore, communism is a judgment against our failure to make democracy real and follow through on the revolutions we initiated. Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.”

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This oft misunderstood and misinterpreted concept—so readily dismissed by the Nietzsches of the world as a weak and cowardly force—has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the first epistle of Saint John:

Let us love one another; for love is God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Let us hope that this spirit will become the order of the day. We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate. As Arnold Toynbee says: “Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice of life and good against the damning choice of death and evil. Therefore the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word.”

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The “tide in the affairs of men” does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: “Too late.” There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. “The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on . . . ” We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.

We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing world—a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Will our message be that the forces of American life militate against their arrival as full men, and we send our deepest regrets? Or will there be another message, of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.

As that noble bard of yesterday, James Russell Lowell, eloquently stated:

*Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah,
Offring each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong:
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above his own.*



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New Songs (for Kassandra)

[continued]

If (et tu?)

If high was not enough, no sunrise again
salmon & a calm, no touch what inner
deity wishes, if the green could not salve
by seed or shade, if music dissolve
by its own seductive sugar, if
dream tonight could best offer a
coffin & a forgetting, what remain wild &
unseen & laughing, blue & raw with bliss?

Hearts

Death somewhat depart again, & here is
love arrived past my break, from sing to
careen to sing anew, raise the magick
root & spread it high & long, a thousand
words to ask why the universe, why desire.
'Thousand thousand & little through the
window, more leaves for the resistance,
more drums for the dance. None love
the fist of war but few hark the kiss of
peace, & I sit here tonight within elixir's
farther reach, falling to dream of our
carriage & a path seductive with brighter trembles.

Strange

Lean my arms til heart burst,
 call it birth of a cry long borne,
 smear it pain across the night,
 hark new sparkle in sky & soil.

Break the binary, highs forever rave
 through the universe on broken, bloody
 feet. She flushes berry as we vine
 & moan, love's music the world's oldest growl.

What answers yet untold to sore yearn
 in flesh, leaves, summer's brittle buzz,
 biting snowy dusks? How deep the inhale
 of world's breath, how far heard its beat,

how great its song? Love she preys
 on my hoary want, new thrills my
 roots, thicks my fruits' honey. Worst
 careen yet came, & I nearly fell.

What held, universe? What held?

Aver

Strange too, heart burst not my own,
 its cry carried through me & along
 the brown surf, riddles of gaunt fields, &
 follow with blood's believing grit, something
 matters & I do too, something matters & you
 do too, fear the old bones a greening world
 feeds. Dream tonight like a new universe
 aborning. Love tomorrow & tomorrow til the most
 rubbled face sheens with surprise & new want.

Lost

Raw sky flicks within & remember,
 many streets then & high among the threads,
 the one-legged prophet in his crown of sage,
 redbearded antichrist roaring through trash,
 his touch jarring soft, his long tattooed
 lover with dripping brush & fell gone
 melodies, shops & cities unknown histories,
 how the hours recline & diminish.

Lost it hurts but sudden moments of miracle,
 left glints, right caresses, shaking wild
 the web, what's this face, why those words?
 What the surface, which the dream?
 Countless carriages, countless love, call it
 all a freak's happy ride tonight & swing on,
 your home no longer a from but a to.

He told me what matters in blind purple
 rants, she sundanced out his rhythms with
 flaming ropes, how the hours rise & play
 blood better, lost when home no longer a where
 but a why, tonight every tree & alley
 sparkle with hunger to give & give & teach others how—

Raw

What matters is when they bite you hard
 you bite back harder. When the days taste
 poison you spit them out & stop swallowing.
 When love crushes, you crawl away fast.
 When love flares again, you cackle & praise.
 What matters is that you never look into
 your glass & think: "shit." What matters
 is if you do, scorch the world & raise anew.

Cut

Call it dreamlinger, tapped darkness within,
 how teeth & claws snaggle private song, drag it
 near, the tearing face, biting wings, wait
 til it sleeps, wait til it sleeps. Monster's fade,
 lift loose & gone, cling lastly to life's bastard hope,
 when you flew between trees, conjure hands & go:

Hope calls two stones together a foundation.
 Hope recks highest moon its true companion.

Now wake: let it follow your day, still
 sleeping, let it near, no fade, no fear.
 Face of torches rub you feline, urge you
 hard, move you off a step, another.
 Push back. Give it night's furious breath
 from your depthless golden sack. Seize your song:

Spark up worlds unseen again & call it Art.
 Remember wherefrom with spiking's rhythms of dignity.

Day's long grapple how it cuts at dream's
 lingering vein, mocks by blind feeding
 wire & clownish trade. How the faces bleat
 quietly til a brightly goatish laugh & the day
 shivers with brittle awe. What now, what next?
 Life's fidelities seem much a brutish scatter:

But wailing swerve the golden crumble & neon bite.
 Caterwaul prayer beyond jagged houses of habit.

Dusk spread by patches with a rust's creep,
 by puddles with a ghostly prowl, come wilderland
 of truths to city & ville alike. Shaped metal
 bumped back by conflagrations of wood & rhythm.
 Every flesh is lightning, ready for the wild
 swing out & breach new the space within:

Now break it wide with want's raging torque.
 Now the old mystery is anew: water & how you came to be.

Endless nocturne of abandoned roads &
 trackless sky, collecting fragments of
 God, heart bearing its scarves of hope,
 tending to where mercy hoards & what pity
 forgives. Wavering hands & leafless trees &
 raw fear of the cage & grave too:

Dream leans you toward what leans toward you.
 What's rising will bear you along until you learn how.

Rejoice

Path from I to we, through vines & sea,
 through masques & blend, loud shows & Zen,
 from I to we, sugar to ease, mutts
 & dollies, freaks & lollies, neon umber
 to petal rose, higher & higher, cliffs
 & does, papers that blare, badges that sin,

what the exit out? Love's long fall within.

Rejoice!

From I to we & again, grace both
 neither & whole, the waking in kindness,
 the blackout of cruel, small tails,
 small hands, famous eyes, herds of
 play—great men smile & climb lower. What
 rests lightest is wisdom & spends just like sunshine.

Corona

Blue taxi blows green sparkles at my
 low shamble, cold rains cut the night wide.
 Again I am in love & know how to hang on despite.
 Nocturnal music traces through neon & then oak.
 I'm finding selves old & new within, again.
 I am in love & ten men could not beat it off me.

Roads go nowhere til someone takes a new
 step, nods, & a next one. I am in love
 & can't tell my oldest brothers, they fall apart
 in many of my dreams & urge nothing anymore.
 As dogs we ran, chasing scent, calling
 it song as men do. Where that scent now?

Raise it, that grace within your chest,
 up, up now! Let it out. World howls truths
 everywhere. Let it out! I am in love & trust you will do well.

High Road Over Water

These nights through my heart toward
 older nights, starry clouds churning up song
 among them. We still bloom, the stars
 & books & wants & I, still careen the long
 trails of hope on slow dank carriages,
 watching wasted fences & men's fears aflame.
 Still bloom, conjure scarlet fancies for maiden's
 sigh. Still bloom, without root to worship
 or demise yet known. Streetlights low on
 highways accelerating press by huts of
 half-dead souls, soon dream of what's gone.
 These nights befriend without counsel, &
 daylight come, secret fellowship dispersed.

What Bend, What Break

They brought him for powers he carried,
 an odd human magick to shape words &
 move souls. They crowded toward his hands,
 offered their sugar & their sex, wished
 also to see up, over, & through like him.
 He inquired no names. At winter solstice
 he punished the village by his absence.
 By spring few remembered their older
 sturdy days. Midnight bonfires devolved
 to ritual, orgies fewer, mere ceremony.
 Will crushed by devotion, old trees halved
 for passing furies, birds & wolves gone
 but the fullest moon. "You must believe!"
 he cried through the cracks & the blood.
 Eventually, nothing remained but the net.

Slave

Elusive sweet, seeds on a fading breeze,
 what lips touched upon its highest hour &
 still long keep, love in strong wood before
 the first cut, what old clowns reign the
 heart, what pines for our pining, how faces
 seen at rest are going blurs of yearn, slaves to
 what? Cries in the leaves wish but do not explain.

Maul

Fingers vibrate toward dusking night,
 eyes less glaring, melodies cherry up again,
 the long scar of years gentles to a pocked scroll,
 my beloved turns to me in the crimson air
 between us, hand to my face, heart to my yearn,
 moon to my inner tide, roots to my new day's high.

World

Hand's shaking spoon raises the sweet,
 his brown shoes gleam, his memories
 warm with a secret day's kiss, the oils
 smooth along her crevasses, flesh turns
 to dust & feeds the world anew, spirit
 pocks & breaks it a little more, whatever
 god does creation's work smoothly between them.

Rough Circuit

His face a scarred bib tales of his many
 raw hours. His bowl of leaves quell what
 shaking loose within, a taste of water, still
 hungry for a new friend. I want to tell him
 no hour waits without mystery. My love
 sups upon this feast without a passing word.

Remember

A few hours, a few faces, what blows
 back in dreams, & again, some tavern's
 thrashing joy, how love awled a crimson
 scar, & another, remember in ink but
 the prettiest notes still bear life's frail
 stink, deepest rhythms will never undo,
 today will join those days in dust & last forever.

Traverse

Wilds in the travelled heart, where foul
 from old dreams sunk in pitch, where growth
 most ferocious no steady patch to stand—
 Love become a fine sweet roaring, her touch
 true sky to roots, danger to sadness remain,
 stir to power within, prayer the universe may yield.

Beggar

World boils in broken blood, put a coin
 in his hand, merchants wrap the stench &
 call it a prize to the morning crowds, kings
 sober to its many centuries while assure
 to the steady thump within, musicians find
 its potent a knot with rhythms to wrestle,

melodies to lure rawer lovers into high
 moon's dance. Put a coin in to his hand,
 you have never lived before, your gestures
 are your own, drive on harder tonight,
 say no more to broken blood, begin there
 on Pine Street by way of hope's insist you will,

a coin in his hand, a hand upon his side,
 tap the light softly, perhaps its petals will
 undo, world boils in broken blood, nod &
 desist. Further along Pine Street another &
 not turn away. Not again. Not for coins,
 not for anything. Beggar what possible & reveal what else.

Tribe

Sunk in flesh among hours, its snarls & mews,
 watch two pups hurry in rhyme to a master's click,
 I pass hungry for meat & tired of truth.

Grace

Flesh not dreaming of mountain or high book,
 pink & green torrid for this sniffing, swallowing,
 moment, trailing raindrops on a labia bloom,
 three fingers against a cheek's shadow, moan
 it harder, flesh for spiced fruit & jumpy
 bourbon colored skies, sans a rule or a wrong,
 only knots of blood remain to trace & call
 history, flesh isn't listening & you blow wide again.

Trance

Most hours a blunder toward suck or sup,
 pass of dirty floors & wrecked hulls, & a
 hundred dull eyes patter down & move by.

Then a causeless slip into the hidden sugar
 of creation, what danced first & will shine last,
 wings arc through amber skies & tangerine leaves—

Some face turns near or away. Brute flesh
 raises corona of cries, howls from the war &
 bed's empty dreaming. Blink, roar. Crumble & submit.

Beasts herd into boxes of knives & there is
 no why but hunger & meat.

Liminal

Long piss toward the far ether,
 good greeting from the grass & passing
 bodies, hot arc of years caterwaul
 choiceless cling to this globe, nights
 sweet when sips of spark & blooms,
 foul when skin withdraws to olden soil—
 when little difference seen between what
 sings out one end & shits from the other.

Mending

Mending continues in the morning cold &
light, by drop by drop world accumulates
& exhausts. Roads crack by noon, burn, cities
follow. Kings & ways. Empty dusk instills the
desperate vigor of loss. She mixes berries with
moonlight & we eat—on night's lovely indifferent shores.

Vagabond

Raise it up again in your sweat & rags,
more of the olden song, still pushing
out the green buds & biting pink fruit.
Call it blood's deep thrash & no way out.
No way on. No way at all. Reck dusky light
curling round spurting leaves, the world's, your own:

One hand bids cross. The other blinks cease.
Yours yet to rouse up the third, & swing it hard.

Conspire

What new earth dreaming nearer tonight?
What restless among babes & blossoms,
signals by oaks & across seas, who
expires grasping the extra word needed?
Nets in the sheen & veins high toward
explain, which rhythm brings us nigh?

Who born tonight knowing both war & its resolve?

A Fierce Wash of Clouds

*"Where was I hiding out,
where did I bury myself?"*
—Wisława Szymborska,
"May 16, 1973," 1993.

The hardest strums through the heart
came first, echoes running alien wild
through later years, strange melodic worlds
born of old hurt, forgot rails, a violet
hairbrush, & brutal indecision. Even now,
these nights of blowing crimson blossoms.

Hardest strums came first & reck their
echoes tonight, rain through a lover's
window feeding brightly where another hour's
like fang to flesh. Raw crowds in the
high moon leap toward them, dark nut of
deep forest burst with a thousand groping cries.

Hardest strums through neon desert cities
strange as chocolate, most visible from
afar, we heave, fall back, then another
morning, we break to fragments, liquid
to light to aching chalices of blood,
no explain better than memory's brutal freight.

Strum, strum hardest, bear the danger
within how you will, its endless question,
ceaseless yearn, bodiless laugh & yet
a fragrant promise in your passing
flesh, scrawled with scant instructions:
here comes the echo, here comes the strum.

Here you are still, not dead, finished, nor much begun.

Comfort

The mesmer of dreamless yearn, a hand
 relaxes in mellow light, no result but continue.
 I am wishful of friends in the long terrestrial night.

Impact

Marry her touch of adore
 to thoughts of least & less,
 & call next moment by its truth:
 a mystery, a vein brutal with flow.

News

The war first came when one man leaned
 on another man's breath. Share the air or
 seek its rule? Every hour newly decide.

Lesson

Desire the fruit of heat, love sets
 all alight. The trinkets governing
 the streets boneless to a soft, hard, first kiss.

Reveal

Each day sheds its hours like none before
 nor any to come, this grass lord of all
 green, that sky a god to all wishing
 crimson's true glow, stars secret sheen.
 New with breast unstroked, fruit just now
 falling, egg's hatch, & hark that first new song!

Erotic

Strums of fingers to moonlight's
 window falling. A hand where a
 heart needs it most. Where the break must heal.

Promise

By day I waste among coins & crowds,
 become a freak's charnel of whiffing wishes,
 fed to sunshine by toothed branches & burs—

By night I fall wide, slow & sudden
 the pink flash, new fuel tumbles in,
 hope's great careen, music's lawless surge—

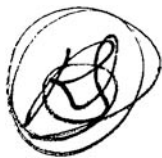
yet what by morn remains of dream's brilliant harass?

Thrash

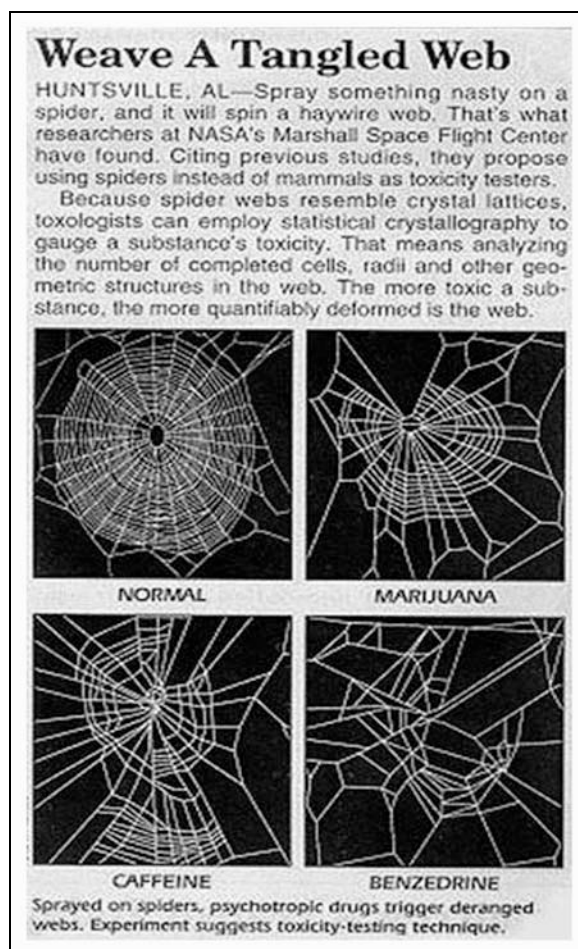
The world's fleshly cage or a more primitive
 spark the foul tether? Lawless wilds of
 desire or the trail of crimson blooms unto
 the straight costumed fury of settled men?
 What skylines would blithe let burn for
 another hour among violet shadows & wordless books?

Many Sweets

Desire flutters in the shadow of a branch,
 where a hand unnoticed reaches, less inches,
 my nods between our words when I decide
 (& decide again to be sure),
 how walking together more we than astride,
 & I don't know where from or why,
 from a linger to a lasting, a billow to a tide.



To be continued in Cenacle | 59 | October 2006





G. C. Dillon



The Lost Days

It was a lovely winter morning in the Southern United States. A light snow from the night before covered the grass and the red clay soil of the hillsides. An elderly man made his way through Memorial Park of the largest town in Smithfield County. He pushed a Bi-Lo shopping cart along the concrete walkways, cutting half-inch deep ruts in the snow. A ripped ad for toothpaste hung on the front of the cart, almost, yet not, a car's license plate. The man wore a faded, brown trench coat, fingerless gloves, and sneakers with a small hole in the toe of the right foot, from which soiled newspaper could be seen. He stopped at a trash bin, and began to search through it. It was his daily ritual, to canvass the park and pick up soda pop cans and plastic bottles before the maintenance workers came by. While there were fewer to collect during the colder season, it was easier as no high school students were hired to clean the park.

"Megrim, you wanted to meet." A voice came out of a small clump of bushes, mostly bare branches this time of year. It came from a Pixie, an Elf, a Fairy, the Sidhe, a Peri, one of the Wee Folk, call it what you will. Its kind has been known by many names, by these and many more. It had jade skin, pointed ears, and wispy, curnute antennae.

"Shh, Tior. They'll think I'm talking to myself," he said, pointing a grimy thumb at two business-suited people having an early morning smoke in the park. White clouds streamed from their mouths. Church bells rang through the air, tolling nine o'clock. The old man took a can out of the bin, and poured its remaining contents on the ground. A small orange stain ate into the newly fallen snow.

"Does this state even have a bottle return law?"

Megrim looked pensive a moment, then said, "No matter. I'll bring them back in a state that does.

"Chilly this morning, eh? Must be only a single degree. Wait. That's on old Isaac's scale. Guess I still gauge the temps in it. That would be . . . oh, let's see . . . times sixty, divide by eleven, add thirty-two . . . 37 degrees Fahrenheit. I studied with him, you know. Newton, I mean."

"Megrim, you wanted to meet." Tior was growing impatient.

"I did? I did! I need your assistance. Get in."

"In there?" The Pixie pointed at the cart. Megrim moved his ripped plastic bag aside to reveal a corrugated cardboard box with the name of a local egg farm printed in stylized lettering along the side. *Johnnie Greene's* it read. It looked surprisingly clean and dry.

"As warm as a dragon's egg and twice as safe."

"Why?"

"I need you to be my anchor, my lifeline back."

"Back from where?"

"The Lost Days."

* * * * *

“What is today?” asked Megrim, the wizard.

“Dies Dominica,” Tior said. “Sunday.”

“February 29th, in fact. It’s known as leap year.”

“I recall. An extra date in those of your years that can be divided by four evenly.”

“Unless divisible by one hundred, but not by four hundred.”

“You humans make everything so difficult.”

Megrim began to chuckle. “That we do.”

“Not that I am not happy to see you, but do you not know any other wizards who can help you? Prospero perhaps?”

“Despite all we have learned, every talent we may employ, every feat we can accomplish, we wizards are still human. Earlier I said I thought of the temperature in the measuring I learned in my youth as an alchemist so long ago. I also think in terms of a calendar. I may miss a day or two, here and there, but I am still living in mortal time. I am susceptible to The Lost Days. You, Tior, are not.”

Megrim continued pushing his cart. Slowly the scenery changed, from the downtown park, through the quaint old Main Street businesses, to the sprawling mega-store franchises. Slowly the houses became older, built with long porches and stately widow’s walks. A few of the buildings had small bronze plaques listing their date of construction.

“What do you know of calendars, Tior?”

“They have pictures of puppies and covered bridges, or else swimsuit models and firemen.”

“Fascinating topic,” the wizard continued, ignoring his comments. “The strict Islamic calendar relies on actual sighting of the moon, which can be quite a spot of bother in inclement weather.” Megrim laughed softly.

“Megrim . . .”

“The Hebrew calendar has regular, incomplete, and abundant years. The Gregorian calendar replaced the Julian one. Not to be confused with Julian period or computerspeak’s Julian dates . . .”

“Megrim.”

“Julius Caesar’s calendar was replaced by Pope Gregory XIII néé Ugo Buoncompagni—not the Great one, I’m afraid—in the sixteenth century.”

“Megrim!” Tior shouted. “Get to the point. Please.”

“I was just getting to that. Tsk. Tsk. You should have more patience.” Tior settled himself uneasily in his cardboard carton. “Where was I?” The wizard began to stroke his long white beard. “When the new dating system went into effect in October of 1582, dates were removed; the calendar jumped ten days. Great Britain and its English possessions, being a proper Protestant country, didn’t adopt the papist, Gregorian calendar until anno Domini 1752 when Wednesday, the second of September, was followed by Thursday the fourteenth.”

“Megrim,” pleaded the Pixie in the box.

“This fine state was an English possession at that time so this area lost those eleven days.”

“The Lost Days.”

“Yes, one grouping of them at least. But that’s not exactly the reason I called you.”

“No?” Tior asked, exasperated.

“What if someone had been caught up in that missing time?”

“By caught up,” Tior said, “you mean trapped.”

“Exactly my point.” Megrim slapped the handle of the cart. “Who told you?”

Tior looked about. The wizard had stopped on the steps of a large mansion. A wooden billboard near the cart relayed the hours of the Stoughton-Endicott House Museum. It opened at noon on Sundays, and the gift *shoppe* opened at 1:30 p.m. The sign informed all that the original building had been built by Fitzhugh Endicott and had been turned over to the Smithfield Historical Society by the two Stoughton sisters in 1956. “Dowagers,” Megrim mouthed.

“Today, being the one hundred third Gregorian leap year, gives me a homeopathic portal into The Lost Days. Any leap year, any hiccup in time, will do. Oh, I suppose I could even attempt it at the start to Daylight Saving Time, but that is less than a blink to the cosmos, a bit of flatulence in the chronosphere. Besides, who wants to stay up till 2 a.m.?” Megrim paused. “A least in this city.” And smiled.

Megrim began to go through his pockets. “Now, where was it? I shall need it.” The wizard stopped and rummaged in the plastic bags in Tior’s cart. “Ho, hee,” he cried, and pulled forth a slender orchestra conductor’s baton, a small green price sticker still stuck to its weightier end.

“Is that your wand?” asked the Pixie.

Megrim looked startled. “Course not!” He lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “It’s me staff.” He straightened.

“I must be a pied piper to lead these rats out of the temporal prison of Hamelin.” He brought the baton to his lips and pretended to blow into a flute, his fingers tapping fluidly on the wood.

“You mean children, don’t you?”

Megrim thought a moment. “Yes.”

* * * * *

Megrim began to wave his “staff” about and intone various words, some not spoken in centuries. “Chronos and Janus, dispel the vapours of time, reveal the Othergate,” he finished, and put the baton into his left breast pocket. “Nothing clears the mind or excites the blood like a spot of magic. It’s like mystical snuff. Come along.” The Pixie followed the wizard. The air seemed heavy and the Pixie’s normally sharp eyes could see little in the hazy atmosphere. Did they go through a doorway? Or was it Megrim’s Othergate? Then Tior’s vision cleared suddenly and they were in a spacious room of the mansion.

The sitting room was occupied by two people. One was a tall man who wore knee-length breeches and a black waistcoat. His hair had just begun to sprout grey hairs. The other was a woman of the same age. A woolen shawl was cast casually about her shoulders and bodice. An oaken table was set with a white lace cloth and piled high with plates of scones, bowls of boiled peanuts, and a tea set. A tea ball slowly dripped its excess onto a small tea towel.

“There is something off about this food. It’s not rancid exactly, but off in some way.”

“Tior. What do you expect? It is over two hundred twenty-two years old.”

The man approached them. Surprisingly, he did not appear surprised by two strangers suddenly appearing in his house. “Colonel Endicott at your service. Are you an itinerant preacher, sir?”

Megrim paused a moment, recalling that the Great Awakening was barely a decade past for Endicott. He hooked his thumbs into his coat lapels and said, “Verily.” He then pulled an oblong leather book from his pocket. A thin black ribbon was thrust between two leaves of the tome, marking an important passage, no doubt.

"Is this your slave?" The man asked, bending down to get a closer look at Tior. "I've never seen the like."

"You keep thralls!" Tior's bronze dirk was halfway out of its sheath by the time Megrim gently laid a hand on his shoulder.

"They're not here. Different calendar. Their entrapment ended ages ago." Though, the wizard mused without informing the Pixie, household servants—*slaves*—could be present. Megrim saw something that interested him in the corner. He strode toward a piano. Lifting the lid over the keys, he mashed his fingers over the ivory. Even Tior could not recognize Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* from the wizard's rendition.

"I say," Endicott interjected. "Is that in tune? I spent quite a few sterling having that shipped from Liverpool."

"Fitzhugh, you do so go on about that. You will embarrass our guest. Parson, do have some of our pee-can pie."

"Miss Julia, I am not embarrassing anyone. I am simply stating a fact. We in his Majesty's Colonies are honest, but roughhewn, craftsman. These amenities of luxury come from the motherland at no little price."

"You are a Tory, sir." Megrim smiled widely, pointing with his book. Before another word could be spoken, a child's slight voice sounded.

"Momma, have you seen Phoebe?" Tior turned toward the speaker. It was a young girl—blonde, dressed in the long and simple Colonial garb. A white apron covered her cotton shortgown, and a small blue country cap covered her hair. She carried a rag-doll sporting a burlap blanket shirt; its corn-cob face was painted with a big smile and the wide eyes of the Manga au currant two hundred years hence.

"No darling. I haven't seen her all . . . all . . ."

"Day?" suggested the wizard to Mrs. Julia Endicott.

"Oooh, who are you?" the young girl asked. Her brown eyes grew wide looking at the Pixie. "My name is Sarah."

"Hello," he replied. "I am Tior."

"You haven't seen Phoebe have you?"

"Is Phoebe . . ." Tior turned toward the wizard. "Is she one with a different calendar?"

Megrim shook his head affirmative. Sarah answered: "She's my nanny."

The wizard then took the Endicotts by the arms and led them to a seat by the windows. September sunshine shown down upon their faces. The afternoon shadows lengthened as they conversed. Megrim tried desperately to impress the danger of The Lost Days upon the Southern couple. Their faces betrayed the fact that they believed him to be a madman. The wizard took Julia's hand in his own. "Mrs. Endicott, please you must believe me."

"I do not understand why you wish us to abandon our home," Endicott replied finally to the wizard.

"Colonel, I implore you. Everyone in this house must follow me and my guide."

"Your guide? It's not Croatoan, is it?"

"No. Not very likely." Megrim looked back at the Pixie as he sat on the floor with Sarah Endicott. He leapt from his seat and called out.

"Tior, can you still see the way back?"

"Yes. It is right there." The Pixie pointed.

"I cannot. We must leave, even if I have failed."

"Megrim, we cannot leave these people like this. They are not living. I would not even say they are existing."

"I can't force them. They have chosen to be here. They will not listen to me, not listen to reason."

"But the child!"

"There is nothing we can do. They're trapped completely by the temporal hysteresis anomaly."

Megrim stepped in the direction the Pixie had indicated the way back was. Tior grabbed the child's hand and began leading her away too.

As before the air around them became cloudy, as if the fog of time had settled about them. If smog is smoke and fog, is this *timog*? Megrim chuckled to himself.

But Sarah cried out, she twisted her wrist to escape the Pixie's grasp. "Momma. Momma," she called out. "Phoebe, help me!" She broke from the Pixie's grasp.

* * * * *

"Tior. Tior, are you there?" Megrim the wizard found himself lying on the snowy lawn before the Stoughton-Endicott Museum. His body formed an unintentional snow-angel as he struggled to rise. If anyone looked carefully they would have noticed there were no footprints leading to the angel. He looked around frantically for the Pixie.

"I am here."

"She could have found her way back from The Lost Days."

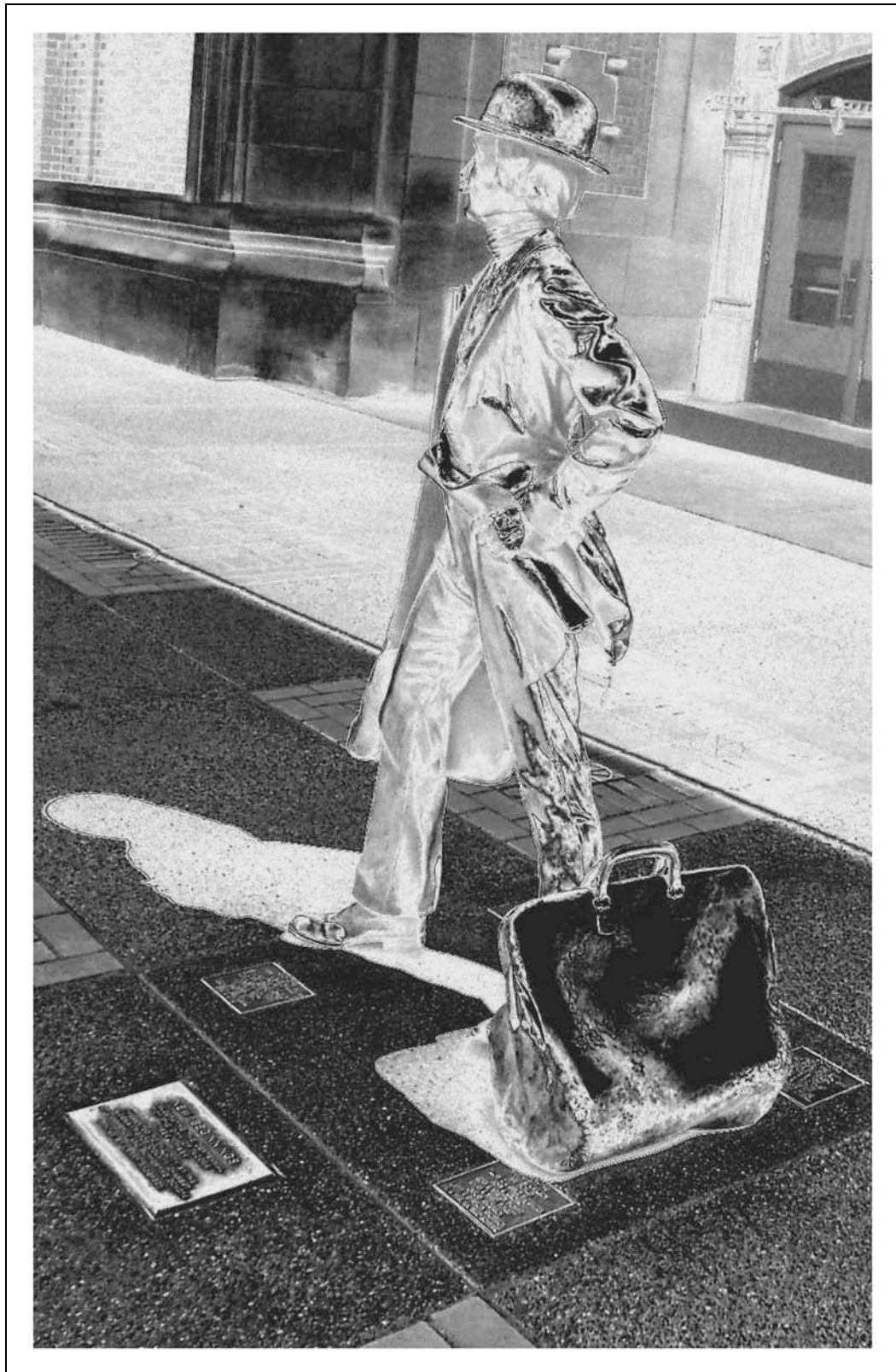
"Sarah is not here."

"Her way back is to the Eighteenth Century C.E. Or she could have gone deeper in to be with her family. I'll never know. This portal is closer to me now. No stamping of the hand for reentry, to be sure."

"A single cast of the die," the Pixie said sadly.

"Now, help me find my cart! We need the cash from those returns. You look like you could use a cuppa tea. And I surely could go for a mug of coffee. I know a glamour spell that might just get us both into Starbucks."





Annie Sprinkle



How Psychedelics Informed My Sex Life and Sex Work

Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, Vol. XII, Number 1.

“Few things feel better than getting high and getting laid.”—David Jay Brown, author of “The ABCs of Erotic Alchemy,” *Hustler Magazine*, April 2000

“Just say KNOW.”—Timothy Leary

I was invited to speak at the AllChemical Arts Conference—a week-long event about entheogens and creativity, to be held in a resort hotel in Hawaii in 1999. I was surprised to be invited, because I had not been a particularly outspoken advocate for these substances. Being a sex worker (call girl/porn actress and director), who often did interviews with the media—especially as I evolved into a controversial performance artist and sex educator—I was routinely trying to debunk the myth that all sex workers were hopeless drug addicts. Fortunately, I have never been a drug addict, but indeed I have tried most every popular drug at least three times.

I was curious about what a conference dedicated to entheogens might be like, and curious about the people who would attend such a conference, so I accepted the invitation to speak. It was as I was preparing my presentation for the illuminati of the psychedelic world that I realized what a profound, and positive impact my psychedelic experiences had had on my life, and in particular, on my sex life. In an aha! moment, it became clear that psychedelics had been perhaps my greatest sex educator.

LSD

When I was fourteen (a full three years before I was to lose my virginity), I had my first psychedelic drug experience. I went to high school in Panama City, Panama in the ‘60s. My father, and most of my friends’ fathers, worked with the American Embassy. We were good, responsible teenagers, so on the weekends our parents let us go up the coast to Panama’s beautiful tropical beaches and stay overnight in beach huts. Those spectacular beaches became the laboratories for our innocent drug experiments. All kinds of inebriants were available: opium, speed, Panama Red Cannabis, mescaline, cocaine, magic mushrooms, LSD, etc. One evening a friend, also fourteen years old, offered me a hit of blotter acid, to “expand my mind.” There were no instructions, no warnings, and no rituals. I tripped my brains out all night long. Totally unprepared for lysergic acid diethylamide, my teenage fears became magnified a thousandfold; the beach crawled with snakes, people morphed into previously unknown life forms, my heart beat out of its chest, my eyes bulged out of my head. I did not surrender, but endured, and could not wait until it was over.

Rough as the night was, the next day I was a wiser person. I had experienced alternate realities, new dimensions, other ways of seeing and feeling. I discovered that life was not necessarily as it appeared. I learned that I had the power to radically change my consciousness, and hence the world around me. This was excellent information to have on my way to becoming an adult—a sexual adult. During subsequent beach weekends I took more LSD trips, usually with a sense of dread and imagined peer pressure, mixed with curiosity. I remember watching water boil for hours, seeing wallpaper patterns becoming kaleidoscopes, and finding God in the eyes of a cat. Mostly I felt paranoid and excruciatingly insecure, but there were moments where I experienced great bliss and yummy sensations. My perceptions were heightened, I felt electric, got all tingly, and was awed by life. My first experiences with altered states came not from having sex, but through psychedelics.

Mescaline

At sixteen, I finally had my first real sexual experience. On that same night, I also had my first mescaline experience. My boyfriend Van was twenty-six. He owned a hippie coffee shop. He was kind, adoring, and wise. We rode his motorcycle to his beach house for the weekend. He offered me a hit of mescaline. We each took one. I half expected him to turn into a three-headed monster at any moment like with LSD, but the mescaline was more gentle and more sensuous than acid. We walked on the beach, hand in hand, and it was a magical experience. I'd never seen so many stars in the sky; the ocean waves and sand were filled with phosphorescent algae. The world was covered in multi-colored glitter. Van kissed me and I couldn't tell where my body started or ended next to his. I felt big love.

After a romantic and transcendental evening on the beach, we went back to his place and he treated me to my first cunnilingus experience. Perhaps it was just timing, but the mescaline was definitely an aphrodisiac. I felt so open, aroused, and trusting. Each touch was amazing. It was the most ecstatic experience I had ever had. A few weeks later, when I turned seventeen, I happily got rid of my virginity with Van. I was expecting intercourse to feel as overwhelming and transcendental as a psychedelic experience. Nice as it was, it didn't feel that way, although later in life it would. At eighteen, I was living a hippie lifestyle in Tucson, Arizona. I did more mescaline, more LSD, and became wildly sexually adventurous. In a famous *Playboy* magazine interview in 1966, Timothy Leary exclaimed that LSD was the most powerful aphrodisiac ever discovered.¹ I don't remember having much, if any, sex while tripping on acid. I did not find LSD conducive to wanting to be intimate or to be touched, although I've talked with plenty of people who have had mind-blowing sex on LSD. However in retrospect, I see that my drug experiences did free me up from following convention. When most of my schoolmates went on to college, I ended up working in a "massage parlor." To everyone's surprise, especially my own, I found my calling! I was already breaking laws by smoking pot and taking psychedelics (which I felt should be legal), so to do illegal prostitution was not that much of a stretch. I believed prostitution should be legal also, and became involved in the prostitutes' rights movement. I enjoyed my "work" and it fit my needs at the time.

Before LSD became illegal, Dr. Stanislav Grof practiced psychotherapy with his patients while they were on LSD, often with very successful results. Sexual issues would sometimes come up, often in surprising ways. In his book, *LSD Psychotherapy*, he wrote that: "Occasionally LSD subjects experienced themselves as participants in complex sexual rituals and ceremonies of different cultures, such as fertility festivals, rites of passage, ancient

temple prostitution, or scenes of phallic worship. Experiences of this kind frequently convey very specific and detailed, historically or anthropologically correct information that was not previously available to the subject.”²² When I started working in prostitution, I felt a strong connection to a long lineage of whores and sexual healers before me. Perhaps this connection was inspired by my psychedelic journeys.

Peyote

Every time I was about to ingest a psychoactive substance, I was hesitant and scared, but something told me there was an important experience to be had, and some key information to be gained, so I pushed myself. It was an opportunity to peek behind “The Veil”—to go beyond everyday reality and connect with the Universe in deep and intimate ways. A psychedelic substance was never once something I desired to do, but something I felt I had to do for personal growth. In the Arizona desert I ate peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) buttons, a plant source of mescaline. People warned me that it was poisonous for the body and would likely make me vomit—it did. I ate the buttons about half a dozen times. One night I had a remarkable erotic experience. I made love with the Earth and the Sky in an energetic and emotional way as I meditated and masturbated (“medibated”) under the stars. I became acutely aware of the sensuality of the desert, of every grain of sand, of the wind, and the plants. It was super erotic, immensely satisfying, and oh so cosmic! After that experience, I expanded my concept of what sex was. It was not simply about bodies coming together for physical sex, but about circulating sexual energy, which was everywhere and available just for the asking. I could tap into it just by tuning in and saying “yes.” I realized that everything was sexual/ sensual—that even all my little cells were all having sex. Sex was both microscopic and enormous.

Other Drugs

At twenty-six I was living in Manhattan. I became interested in exploring my “shadow side,” “Dark Eros,” the worlds of S/M, extreme fetish, dominance/submission. By day I worked in an S/M house as a professional dominatrix/ submissive. By night I frequented the Hellfire Club, a veritable smorgasbord of kinky sex. I experimented with some of the non-psychedelic drugs: crack, angel dust, heroin, etc. I was never a lover of drugs, but I honestly felt it was my duty as a “sex researcher” and “pleasure artist” to try them. I had visited the Temple of Delphi and the brothels of Pompeii. Although I did have some wonderful orgasms on Ecstasy, the experience of Ecstasy was not so much about orgasm or sex, as it was about looking deeply into my Self—heart, soul, and psyche.

I read that throughout history prostitutes utilized various aphrodisiacs and opiates with their clients. In my experience, these drugs were in a different category than the psychedelics. Although I did have some very interesting sexual adventures with these substances, there was not a sense of deep exploration of my soul and psyche. I had a sense of getting high and tuning out, as opposed to going deeper and tuning in. I also saw firsthand how incredibly destructive particular drugs could be when some of my friends became heavily addicted to them. I never met anyone addicted to entheogens.

MDMA/Ecstasy

By the mid-'80s the Great Dying was well underway; AIDS had taken its huge toll on my community. I'd lost many friends and lovers, and was trying to cope. Being a very sexually active gal, I was desperately searching for new, satisfying forms of sexuality, which could be enjoyed without exchanging bodily fluids. I signed up for a three-day Sacred Sex workshop led by a Tantra teacher named Jwala. At the workshop, my workshop partner gave me my first hit of Ecstasy, and that's exactly what I experienced—ecstasy. It's no wonder "E" is extremely popular in the "sex community." Before MDMA became illegal it had been used successfully during marriage/relationship counseling sessions. Therapists found that partners were better able to communicate with each other while on MDMA. It reduces performance anxiety to zero and creates a yummy, lovey-dovey feeling, and a nice shift in consciousness. Needless to say, I became a convert—to Tantra, and to Ecstasy.

I continued to take Ecstasy, once, twice, or three times a year. Jwala taught me about how to do ritual, about "preparing the space," and stating one's intention before making love. I used those same techniques when I would ingest a substance, which really helped make the experiences more satisfying. I mostly preferred taking Ecstasy alone. I used it as a tool for self-evaluation. Usually I would spend some time making love with myself and doing "sexual healing" on myself. The first time I did "E" alone, I fell deeply in love with myself for the first time, which was very good for me as I had a relatively low self-image. This helped me transition out of working in prostitution and appearing in mainstream porn films, and into doing more of the kind of work I wanted to do at that point. I also found myself desiring to connect with women, both sexually and in my work. I started making "feminist porn." The second time I did Ecstasy, I heard a voice tell me to quit smoking tobacco, which I then did permanently, after 25 years of a heavy smoking habit. Another time, I sat naked in front of my mirror and looked at my repressed anger, and let it surface. I hissed like a snake for several hours, and witnessed my inner Medusa in a remarkably non-judgmental and fearless way. I realized how sexual energy and anger are connected. I realized that in order to go to the next level of my sexuality I needed to learn to better express my anger. I practiced, and sure enough, I learned to have long, extended orgasms. When I then produced and directed my own video, *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop* (1992), I captured myself having an extremely intense five-minute-long orgasm. In retrospect I realize that I used a lot of psychedelic imagery in the video. The project was quite successful.

Although I did have some wonderful orgasms on Ecstasy, the experience of Ecstasy was not so much about orgasm or sex, as it was about looking deeply into my Self—heart, soul, and psyche. Each time I took Ecstasy I retained some key piece of information that I could utilize to grow as a person, and expand my (sexual) horizons. I found the lover I had been searching for so long—me! When I took it with lovers, I could feel a sense of empathy with my lover without doing anything. I experienced my body as a temple, and sex as prayer. Ecstasy took me into my heart the way that psychedelics took me into my mind and spirit. Also when on Ecstasy I would sometimes have wonderful, long "crygasms." Ecstasy showed me a deeper kind of love, which I was inspired to create more of in my life, without the drug. And I did. A lover of mine who had studied Tantra in India for several years, told me that with Ecstasy "a person could get to similar ecstatic and spiritual places that took Tantra yogis a lifetime of strict disciplines to get to—if they were lucky enough to ever get to those states." There is of course a down side to Ecstasy. I had some miserable hangovers. I slept with my best friend's husband when I shouldn't have. Oops. Some folks let down their

guard and have risky, unsafe sex, and I'm told that a few people have had medical emergencies with extremely serious consequences.

In 1993, I was at my sexual peak. I was an orgasm on two legs. My sexual energy flowed like bubbly pink champagne throughout my body on a daily basis. I studied and practiced Tantra relatively seriously, and all my chakras were spinning like pinwheels in a strong wind. Around this time I started facilitating sexuality workshops for women. The main thing I taught was the Taoist Erotic Massage Rituals (created by Joseph Kramer of the Body Electric School in Oakland), consisting of intensive genital massage strokes combined with lots of rhythmic breathing. It was powerful and effective stuff! Because of my drug experiences I was prepared to handle the very high erotic vibratory states that these techniques propelled our groups into. Sometimes there were very intense emotions and moments of distress. I was comfortable and experienced enough to manage these transcendental states because of my experiences with drugs. I learned how to take women (and sometimes men) on pseudo-psychedelic journeys—without drugs!

Ketamine

I first heard about ketamine when I went to Hawaii to visit friends, and to attend the 80th birthday party of Dr. John C. Lilly, the infamous psychobiologist, dolphin researcher, and psychedelic enthusiast (who recently passed away). If Dr. Lilly found ketamine so enlightening, I figured it must be worth trying. My friend injected my buttock with a carefully measured dose of "Special K." I slipped right into the deepest trance I'd ever been in. I could not (or did not want to) walk, talk, sit up or do anything, but I was intensely aware of Self. I lay on the bed with my eyes closed. It was extremely visual. Projected on my eyelids were quickly moving three-dimensional fractal-like patterns, one after the other. I had multiple eyegasms! At the same time I experienced absolute, total, inner peace, which was something I was hankering for after years of living in bustling Manhattan and jet-setting around the world. It felt exquisite; like being in that delicious post-orgasm afterglow state, but for a couple of hours.

When I came out of the ketamine experience, I brought with me an overwhelming desire to create a more peaceful life for myself. I moved out of New York City where I had lived for twenty-four years, and I have lived by the sea ever since. I learned that one way to experience peace and bliss was to not do, but to be. My sexuality changed yet again. It became less performative, less active, less energetic. Sex became deeper, slower, and subtler—I call it "Zen sex." With my newfound understanding of how "less could be more," I did something totally wild and experimental: I committed to a serious, monogamous relationship!

Psilocybin Mushrooms

Mostly I have used psilocybin mushrooms with lovers that I was in a close relationship with. These trips have ranged from very mild to intense, depending on the freshness of the mushrooms and the dosage. Usually while on mushrooms I have not found myself wanting to make love in the traditional sense, especially when I'm peaking. Instead I usually prefer having physical space. However, I find it very bonding and very intimate to share such an intense and personal experience with a lover. I would sometimes get insights into our relationship, which we could talk about afterwards. I've found that mushrooms (as

well as the other substances mentioned in this story) can definitely deepen a relationship, in a remarkably similar way that sex does. Coming off mushrooms is an ideal time to do some sensual massage or some serious cuddling. There is a delicious unification with my partner—an openness and vulnerability. My present girlfriend, Barbara, has done well over a thousand psychedelic journeys. She was even a “guinea pig” at Stanford University when they were studying the effects of heavy doses of LSD in the ‘70s. One beautiful summer day, we were on a mountain lake in her rowboat, and we found ourselves tripping without having ingested a thing. Our psychedelic door flew open probably because we had ventured through it many times before. Our love was the drug, and it was strong! Our senses became heightened, time warped, colors were brighter. It felt exactly like we were on mushrooms. I wondered if people who have never done any psychedelics could ever feel the same way, or if our psychedelic experiences enabled us to enhance and intensify the magical feelings of love.

At one point I purposely didn’t ingest any drugs for about six years because I came to feel that drugs were the lazy person’s sex. Why do drugs when one could accomplish the same things from having several hours of sex, and not have any hangover the next day? (This does not work with quickies.) Many people are too lazy, or don’t have the sexual skills to get there. Or they have a limited capacity for sex and pleasure. With a substance there’s no escaping the intensity, and the intoxication. With sex you have to work at it, but in the long run it’s probably better for your health. Then again, variety is the spice of life.

Ayahuasca

Although I have had a number of opportunities, I have not yet tried the plant brew, ayahuasca. I did however try “pharmahuasca” (the synthetic version) with a group of about a dozen friends. We were led by an experienced guide and his excellent and caring assistants. We prepared for a couple of days with fasting and enemas, then took the pharmahuasca along with a fairly heavy dose of mushrooms. Our guide said the mushrooms helped make the pharmahuasca more visual.

When I took off it was like I had an entire New Age greeting card shop behind my eyelids. It was the longest, most intense, most hallucinatory, most physical of all journeys I’d ever been on. It lasted about ten hours, with several hours more coming down. I lay still the whole time with my eyes closed; except when I rolled over to purge into a bowl, something everyone in the group did repeatedly (a wonderfully kinky and intimate group experience). This substance affects the nervous system quite strongly, so I had lots of sweats and chills, and other very strange physical sensations, like a snake made of air whipping around my body.

At the time of this journey, my father was dying of cancer, so my journey was a lot about pain, fear, and death. I saw the “complexity of the Universe” as a huge, fast, megamachine. I saw clowns, gargoyles, Goddesses, and Virgin Marys. I saw bloodshed in Rwanda, Jon-Benet Ramsey being murdered, and I saw myself being stabbed to death by a serial killer. I saw my father in the hospital on a respirator struggling to stay alive. I saw all these things without any judgments. There was no good or bad. Everything worked together, like yin with yang. I became acutely aware of the “human condition.” I saw compassion as the best salvation for myself and all people and things. Lots of thoughts and feelings came up about my body, and about the aging process. Sometimes I felt strong, healthy, and light; other times I felt old, fat, and polluted. I believed that the ayahuasca was helping to prepare me for my death.

In the months that followed, sex became more about soul merging, loving support, and nurturing and comforting each other before we die. It became more serious than before. It felt like I had achieved a level of sexual maturity, and at the same time I grieved for my youthful enthusiasm and naïveté. This journey inspired me to make a sex film called *Teenage Mermaid Fanta-sea*. I play an elder mermaid who initiates a young mermaid into the treasures of her sexuality. I teach the young mermaid how to seduce a diver, and then in the end I die an orgasmic death.

Sex and Psychedelics

Clearly my experiences with psychedelics have been educational and beneficial with regard to my own sexuality and my life's work. From my observations, these psychoactive drugs have not been harmful in any way for me, or for the people I know who have used them. Terence McKenna pointed out that: "The profundity of [hallucinogenic inebriation] and its potential for a positive feedback into the process of reorganizing the personality should have long ago made psychedelics an indispensable tool for psychotherapy."³

And I might add, a tool for sex therapy. Oddly enough, I have not found a whole lot written about psychedelics in relation to sex, when to me they seem so totally interconnected.

From what I have gathered, psychedelics are generally not used much as aphrodisiacs for sexual arousal—although people do report having phantastasmagorical sexual experiences on them. More often the user gains some key information, has a new experience, or sees her/himself from a new perspective, and any of this can greatly inform that person's sexual life. Just as each sexual experience can potentially teach us something about sex, each drug experience can potentially teach us something about sex. And for that matter, sexual experiences can potentially teach us something about how to take drug trips more effectively. As I became more sexually experienced, I became much better at handling my psychedelic journeys. I learned how to not have expectations, and how to surrender.

The Drug Workshop (<http://www.drugworkshop.net>), a web site with sensible information regarding drug use, says: "Sex is a drug! The biological chemistry of sex is a lot like that of psychoactive drugs. So when you have sex on drugs, you are having sex with that drug." Interesting concept, to have sex with the drug (or plant) itself. The site also stresses the importance of whom you decide to do your drugs with. I couldn't agree more. Set and setting are so important. Journeying with one or more experienced guide(s) is generally the best way to go.

So if psychedelics have the potential to be so beneficial, why did they get such a bad rap? Perhaps for some of the same reasons that sex gets a bad rap. Terence McKenna offered an explanation for why drugs and sex get suppressed and why "just say no" doesn't work:

"Sexuality is the glory of the living experience. Ecstasy is the contemplation of wholeness. That's why when you experience ecstasy—when you contemplate wholeness—you come down remade in terms of the political and social arena because you have seen the larger picture."⁴

People tend to link "sex and drugs" because both are condemned by society. Nevertheless, throughout the ages human beings have continually searched for more ecstasy,

more sexual satisfaction, for solutions to their sexual problems, and for aphrodisiacs. Psychoactive substances have been used in most cultures because they can be keys to unlock the mysteries of life. Of course as each mystery is unraveled, a bunch of new ones appear. Both sex and psychedelics are ultimately about consciousness, about self discovery, and going beyond everyday reality to that magical place—somewhere over the rainbow, where we feel Divine and we experience some truth. Granted, both sex and psychedelic drugs are generally used unconsciously by most people.⁵ We need to work on that.

Needless to say, the AllChemical Arts Conference in Hawaii was absolutely wonderful, and so were all the people who attended it. I had a fantastic time and learned a whole lot. Since that conference I decided to support more research into these drugs, support law reform, and come out as an advocate for the safe use of psychedelics—especially with regard to sex research and sex education. I’m hoping someone will soon have the courage to organize a conference on sex and psychedelics. I’ll be there with bells on!

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- ⁴ McKenna, T. 1991. *The Archaic Revival*. Harper Collins.
- ⁵ Pointed out over dinner by Christina Saint Laurent.



Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 48 | April 2003. There are few people I've known in my life whose poetical gifts come near to his. If the world operated on the basis of talent and moral decency, Ric would be publishing fat books of poems for a large audience, living by the seaside, maybe leader of a colony of singers, dreamers, and dancers of many kinds.

G. C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His fiction last appeared in *Cenacle* | 57 | April 2006. His current story is a companion to that previous issue's story. There is a magic within his work which strives deeper than what some pejoratively call *genre* fiction, speaks toward the mystery all great Art aspires toward.

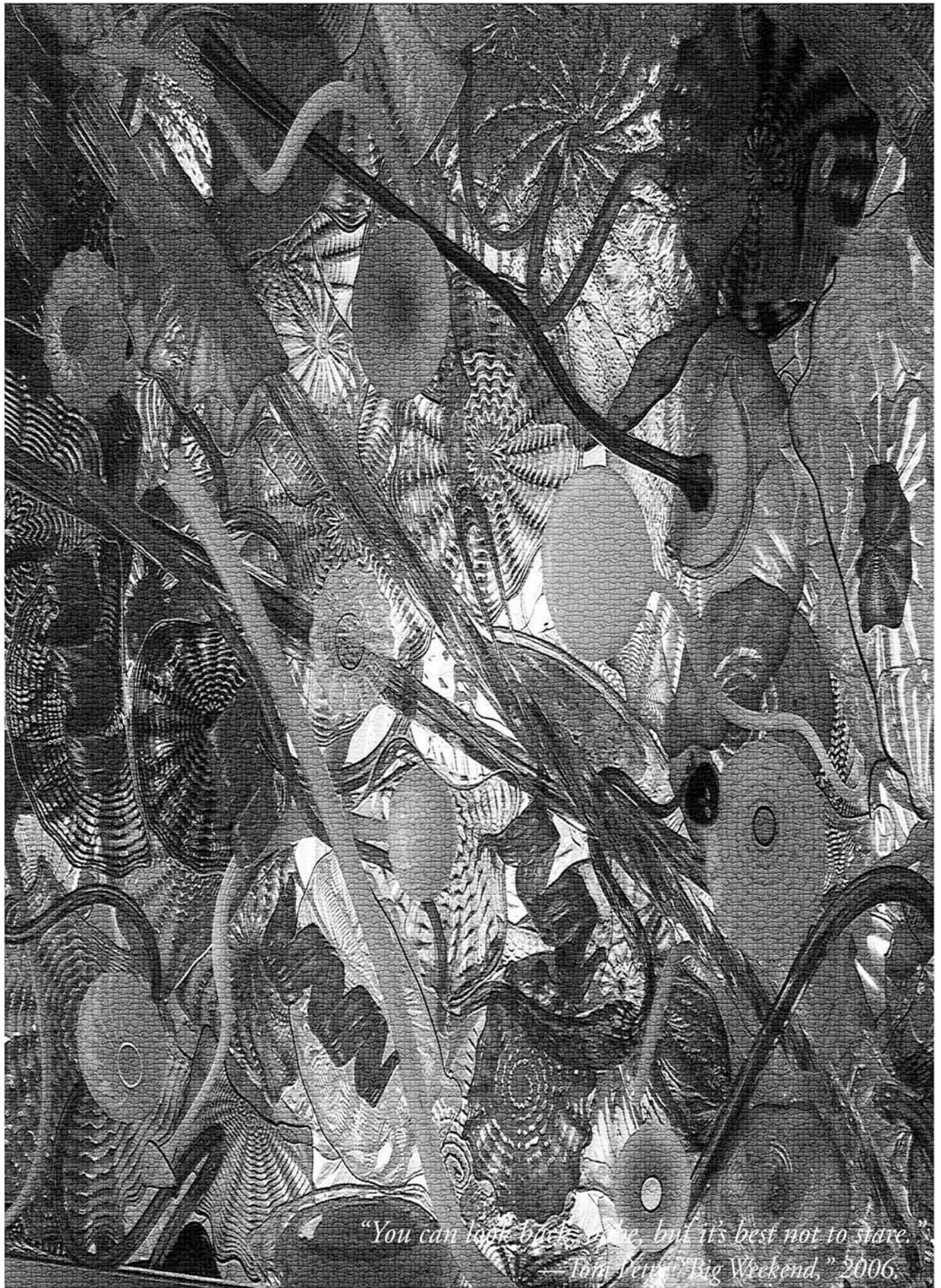
Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Judih lives where the most violent impulses in humankind meet and clash in the name of religious truths. She looks upon the perpetrators of this violence and sees little sacred. She looks at her family and loved ones and sees much.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Seattle, Washington where she studies Social Justice at a local university. Her gifts are many in visual arts, and her kindness and empathy toward the world is inestimable.

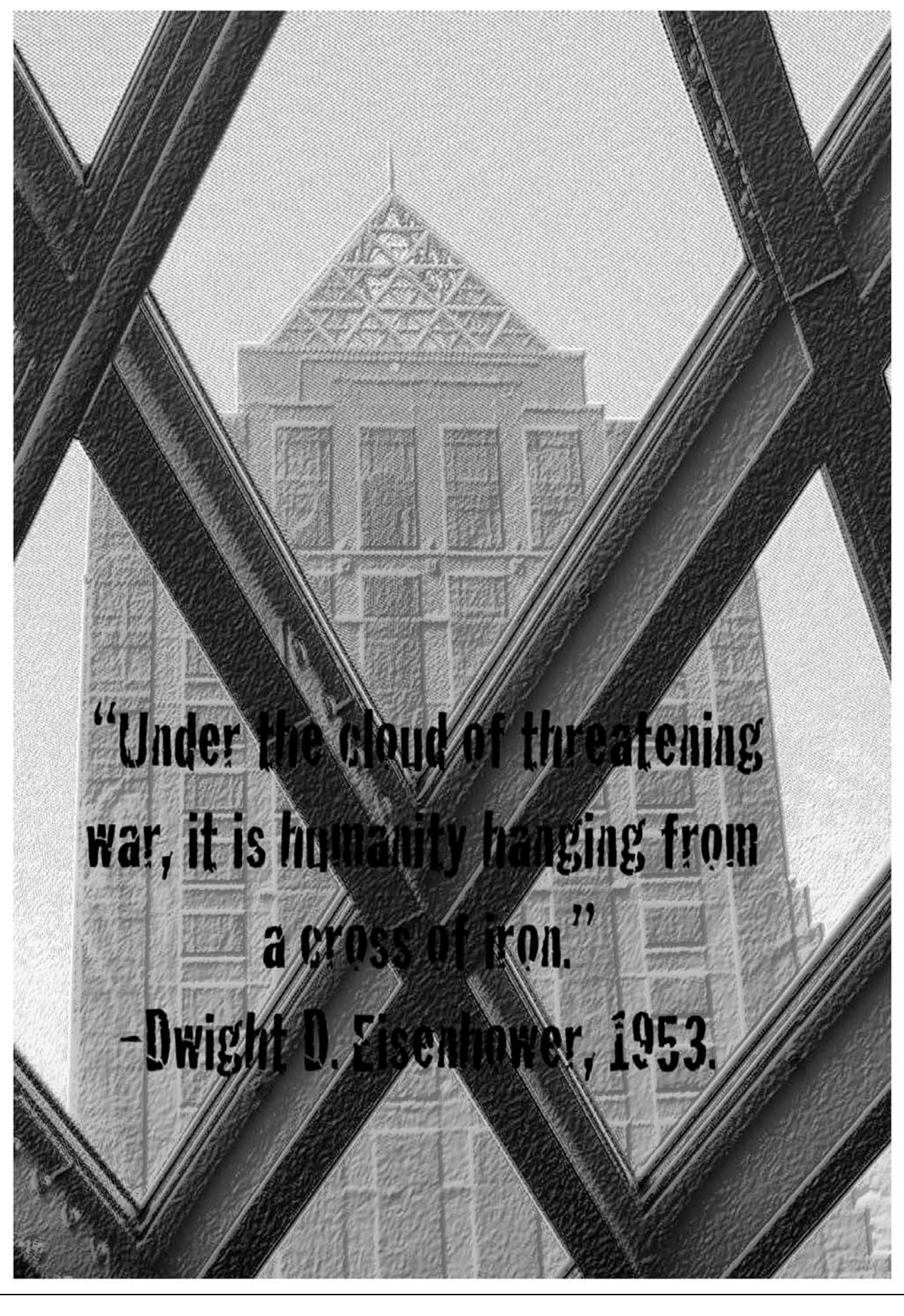
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. He was a preacher of faith and peace and civil rights, inspiring millions to make little and large moves toward a better world. He was murdered by an unknown person or persons in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968, while aiding a garbage workers' strike there. They could not take his pride . . .

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Seattle, Washington. There was a night recently at Bauhaus on Capitol Hill, notebooks and pens for hours, wife with her music and her books, I jacked into my iPod, her name is Polly, probably the Shins or Shpongle going, and drank my magic juice, and looked out the mezzanine prow of the cafe toward the distant neon highway, and was happy to be . . .

Annie M. Sprinkle (born Ellen F. Steinberg July 23, 1954 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) has been a prostitute, stripper, porn film star, cable television host, porn magazine editor and writer, and sex film producer. Currently, Sprinkle works as a performance artist and sex educator. Her essay included here was of a kind long sought out for this publication's pages.



"You can look back, but it's best not to stare."
—Tom Verica, "Big Weekend," 2006.



**“Under the cloud of threatening
war, it is humanity hanging from
a cross of iron.”**

-Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953.